

# Knowing in Our Own Ways

## Women and Kashmir

NITASHA KAUL, ATHER ZIA

When it comes to international conflicts, ignorance is as much an ally as ill-will in their prolongation. The vested interests entrenched in profiting from conflict unsurprisingly seek to limit the range of possible political options that might lead to demilitarisation, dialogue, conciliation, a just peace, and eventually resolution. However, the means by which the conflicts are prolonged relate just as much to the usually effective embargoes on what kind of knowledge can be produced about the conflict, by whom, and with what kind of visibility.

This is acutely so in the case of Kashmir, where ignorance and ill-will work synchronously to produce a simplistic understanding of the region that belies its complexity in terms of its history, politics, competing claims, traumatic memories, divided populations, lack of justice, denial of rights, loss of homes, and cycles of extremism, corruption, and occupation. The mainstream understanding of Kashmir outside the region and globally is predominantly through the prism of an Indian and Pakistani statist narrative. There is little space for Kashmiris and their knowing in their own ways; even less for Kashmiri women speaking about women and Kashmir. In that sense, the present Review of Women's Studies, with all its limitations, provides Kashmiri women this space.

The word "Kashmir" is hypervisible in the Indian discourse today, but in specific and limiting ways. Most Indians and others internationally have a received understanding of Kashmir that is based mostly on media reports, which again tend to be significantly state-centric. Thus, the signifier "Kashmir" is a tremendously powerful one in the contemporary Indian imaginary and, depending on the qualifiers attached to it, it can be made to carry different political meanings and messages. For instance, when used in the public discourse, the terms Kashmiri Pandit, Kashmiri Muslim, Kashmiri men, and Kashmiri women will all perform different discursive functions. Kashmiri women, as part of that hypervisibility, are often presented as passive victims of their men and of the overarching political violence. Our remit and motivation, here, is to initiate the reader into a more complex understanding of women and Kashmir—women of Kashmir, women in Kashmir—as a way of further interrogating the significance of gender in questions of prolonged conflict.

At the outset, we reflect on some of the issues of grouping the themes and the challenges we faced in putting together this review issue. As co-editors, being Kashmiris ourselves, our motive for this review issue was to include the "herstories"

of Kashmir. We have, deliberately and with intent included only work by Kashmiri women. We do not claim to be representative of or speaking for all Kashmiri women, but our motivation is to bring a heightened visibility to at least some Kashmiri scholars who are actively thinking about the intersection of gender and the political dispute. The Kashmiri women writing in these pages are scholars, professionals, and activists who present their analysis in light of history, anthropology, law, and feminist studies. No doubt, there will be other endeavours where we can include a more diverse array of Kashmiri scholars and scholars of Kashmir across genders. We consider this review issue as part of an ongoing endeavour that will prioritise Kashmiri voices that have been usually sidelined. We are aware that in this review issue there is relative absence of gender concerns as they relate to Kashmiri Pandits and other Kashmiri minorities, the Kashmiri and Indian economy, as well as the disputed parts of Kashmir administered by Pakistan and China. It is not that we did not try to find some such voices, but it was not possible always to find or to retain them. In that context, much more work needs to be done, and this is only the beginning.

Each paper in this review issue refers to the conflict, and relies on a wide range of narratives and sources. The aim here is not to provide a definitive account of what Kashmiri women think, or say, or want, or experience. Indeed, for us, as editors, selecting and finalising the papers was a tough balancing act. On the one hand, it is not always possible to request a citation for the experience of being marginalised or of witnessing marginalisation, and, on the other hand, scholarly work cannot rely entirely on assertions. We have tried, wherever possible, to walk this line between acknowledging the theoretical feminist insights and making sense of the empirical realities faced in the colonial periphery of the postcolonial nation.

In a protracted conflict as the one in Kashmir, the life of people remains suspended often, in the time between the next encounter, killing, arrest or curfew. When men become direct victims of state violence, it falls to the women to hold the last vestiges of the community together. Samreen Mushtaq's (p 54) paper

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engages with the ways in which Kashmiri women are part of a more overt and wider political struggle, but also part of the everyday resistance where the binaries of home and outside do not hold, and where the home is not an indicator of safety. She looks at the ways in which everyday resistance can be understood through visibility, resilience, and dignity in the reproduction of the daily existence of Kashmiri life. Ordinary life also features in Mona Bhan's (p 67) paper, but in an extraordinary manner. Bhan shows us how the daily life of ordinary Kashmiris is threatened as Indian policies increasingly weaponise nature. Bhan specifically locates her paper in the aftermath of the floods of 2014, when Kashmiris en masse challenged the notion that the flood was natural, and thus apolitical. Kashmiris linked the questions of nature, and ecological and resource sovereignties to their struggle for self-determination against Indian hegemony. Bhan's paper situates Kashmiri women's narratives of dispossession and the proliferation of Indian investments in mega hydroelectric dams on Kashmir's rivers within this context. Uzma Falak's (p 76) paper is a lyrical analysis of affective female alliances—*vyestoan*—and their liberatory potential. She theorises women's mobilisation in friendships that emerge during protests, demonstrations, and funeral processions of militants and civilians alike who are killed by the government forces. She analyses these linkages not just as a form of support, but also as the creation of a gendered resistance. In Inshah Malik's (p 63) paper, we see how funerals have become spectacular sites of feminist resistance. She challenges the myth of the grieving mother as a passive symbol of patriarchal nationalism, and

meaningfully theorises Kashmiri women's agency in the public sphere.

Mir Fatimah Kanth (p 42) excavates the history of gendered resistance, illustrating a continuity when it comes to women. She looks at women, politics, and subjectivity in relation to the state and its arbitrary exercise of power, and in relation to society and its gendered expectations of women. Kanth's tracing of this history makes it clear that resistance to Indian authority is not a post-1989 phenomenon and certainly has not been bereft of women's participation. In the context of the empowerment of Kashmiri women, Hafsa Kanjwal's (p 36) paper takes us back in time, alerting us to how state-sponsored women empowerment programmes in the early years of post-partition Kashmir resulted in feminist projects that were affiliated with the state, and, in time, became deeply contested and politicised. In this context, women's mobility and education were more geared in the service of consolidating the power and legitimacy of the state, rather than allowing indigenous movements—political or social—to grow and flourish. Essar Batool's (p 60) paper tackles the issue head-on by focusing on sexual violence under intense militarisation and patriarchal norms. Batool, who is also a co-author of an important volume titled *Do You Remember Kunan Poshpora?*, analyses the sexual violence against women, men, and transgender persons in Kashmir at the hands of the government's troops, who are emboldened by the legal immunity provided by laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. While militarisation-related violence works differently on men and women, issues of "shame," "honour," and reprisals mean that fear results in under-reporting of such



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violence for both men and women. Batool also makes the important point of how the structure of patriarchy can act as an ally of state violence and oppression. Alliya Anjum's (p 47) paper makes sense of how militarism and militarisation is linked to a denial and loss of rights, investigating the gendered effects of this in terms of how violence is experienced and why it is perpetrated. She thinks through the conflict-related sexual violence paradigm in the context of Kashmir, calls into question the government response towards human rights abuses in Kashmir, and urges the need for ending impunity, especially in the context of international legal policy, which is stringent and clear with regard to sexual violence in conflicts.

### Understanding Experiences of Women in Kashmir

While the structure of a military occupation cracks down equally on all genders, feminist scholarship has shown us that the interlocking nature of militarism and masculinity means that competing patriarchies of oppression and resistance become mutually constitutive, and women are at the sharp end of both. Understanding and analysing the life experiences and agential potential of women in disputed zones like Kashmir becomes difficult as well as crucial. In addition to the complications of the globally ubiquitous patriarchy, there is the question of how war and occupation is an exercise in gendered hyper masculine power in the context of a conflict zone. Against this backdrop, Kashmiri women deserve to be recognised for their tremendous role in challenging the narratives and impacts of occupation; these are generational struggles, at once poignant and powerful. We think of inspirational women like Parveena Ahangar who is the co-founder and chairperson of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), an organisation that brings together those searching for Kashmiri men who have disappeared in the custody of the Indian armed forces. We think of the 55 Kashmiri women who came together in 2013 under the banner of the Support Group for Kunan Poshpora, and have been key to the annual commemoration of 23 February as Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day. We think of the Kashmiri women of the past, the present, and the future who have spoken truth to power, stood up for their rights, braved all odds and persevered, disrupted both patriarchy and occupation, and have lived to tell their stories, to laugh, sing, and love.

Yet, so many Kashmiris have had their lives brutally cut short by conflict and violence that has been orchestrated to humiliate them and render them bereft of relatives, homes, and hopes. Do you know how Kashmiris remember? Kashmiris, of any and all kinds, map their timelines not merely by running through the years chronologically, but by recalling the years through what they brought: the summers of massacres, months of mass blindings, humiliations of human shields, ceaseless curfews and bans, repeated uprisings, political upheavals, impositions of governor's rule, India-Pakistan border hostilities, rigged elections, mass exodus, and mass rape. Srinagar has flowers that grow on mass graves, lanes that are littered with ruined houses and torture centres that have been turned into official residences. There are soldiers and guns everywhere.

In 2018, the United Nations produced a "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan." The reception of this report in the Indian media was overwhelmingly one of rejection and ridicule. The illegitimacy of the Indian state's actions in Kashmir is aided by a common-sense public opinion of the Indian majority, which only allows for seeing the Kashmiri struggle through the lens of paternalism or jingoism.

What serious scholar of Kashmir could deny the simultaneous existence of human rights abuses and a political problem that needs a political resolution which must involve the Kashmiris themselves? Yet, even something as basic as this is hard to find being reflected in the Indian mainstream media, through which most Indians form their opinions on Kashmir.

We urge the readers of this review issue to move beyond the comfort zone of merely acknowledging the vulnerabilities of the marginalised Kashmiris, by equalising the illicitness of the military and the militants, by thinking past the self-serving machinations of the Indian power brokers at the centre and Kashmiri mainstream politicians at the periphery, and by asking the difficult question: How long must ordinary Kashmiris suffer their traumatic history as endless memory before their calls for freedom and justice are taken seriously enough to warrant a political resolution?

The Kashmiri women herein speak of myriad things: of spectacles and street protests; women's companionships and female alliances; women's movements and imaginaries of resistance; the links between militarisation, militarism, and the creation of impunity by the law; competing patriarchies and sexual violence as they seek to break Kashmiri communities; the infrastructures of control that limit their mobilities, bodies, and experiences; public grief at funerals as a challenge to Indian sovereignty over Kashmir; and autobiographies, oral histories, and the textures of political memories.

In the powerful idiom of postcolonial criticality, the question we should ask is not "Can the Kashmiri women speak?" but rather "Can you hear them?"

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### EPW Index

An author-title index for EPW has been prepared for the years from 1968 to 2012. The PDFs of the Index have been uploaded, year-wise, on the EPW website. Visitors can download the Index for all the years from the site. (The Index for a few years is yet to be prepared and will be uploaded when ready.)

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# Moving from Impunity to Accountability

## Women's Bodies, Identity, and Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Kashmir

ALLIYA ANJUM

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars and the Rwandan genocide, international legal policy on sexual violence in conflicts saw a major shift towards stronger international accountability mechanisms. The establishment of criminal tribunals and the development of the conflict-related sexual violence paradigm were some of the institutional and policy changes that occurred as a result, with both acknowledging that women are targeted in conflicts not only because of their gender, but also due to their ethnic identity. The applicability of the conflict-related sexual violence paradigm to the Kashmir case is explored, thereby underscoring the bigger questions regarding the state's responsiveness towards such human rights abuse, and its commitment towards ending impunity for sexual violence in conflicts.

Kashmir is one of the most militarised conflict sites in the world, with more than half a million troops populating its streets and borders (*Kashmir Times* 2013). The heavy presence of troops and a legal apparatus that provides them immunity signifies that “militarisation” and “militarism” pervade the state’s response to conflict in the region. Militarisation in its plain sense can mean “expansion of the relative size of some integral part, scope or mission of the armed forces”—visible either in military spending, or through the number of soldiers on the streets (Bowman 2002: 19).<sup>1</sup> Militarism, on the other hand, is a system of thinking where military “institutions and ways” are valued more than “civilian life”—where life includes its inextricable signifiers, like dignity, freedom, and health (Lutz 2002: 723). This hierarchical valuation in Kashmir’s case, for instance, is most visible in the operation of immunity laws and the resultant impunity accorded to the armed forces for the smooth functioning of ostensible counter-insurgency operations and the maintenance of law and order (Rediff 2011). Though war is the ultimate manifestation of militarism, militarisation is a wider process that permeates “institutions, values and practices” of the state (Sjöberg 2013: 96). The deeply penetrating and far-reaching effects of militarisation and militarism, on even the everyday lives of civilians, include processes by which “military practices extend into the civilian arena” (Peterson and Runyan 1999: 258), for example, military-sponsored civilian activities like educational tours.<sup>2</sup> A conceptual extension of this analysis of militarism helps locate its pervasiveness in militarised societies such as Kashmir, where the distinctions between combatant and non-combatant, and war and peace, soon begin to dissolve into each other, making rights a natural casualty.<sup>3</sup>

The association between militarisation and denial of rights, thus, has remained an enduring feature of conflicts across time. As Richard Falk (1977: 231) points out, where state power is maintained through military control, a regime insensitive to human rights compliance is a natural outcome. The processes of militarisation and conflict at the same time are not gender-neutral phenomena, in that they inherently rely on heteronormative ideas of masculinity and femininity. The conventional, culturally constructed view of this position is that men, the “just warriors,” make war, and women, as “beautiful souls,” provide “succor and compassion” (Elshtain 1987: 4) and promote peace. This, however, is challenged by studies which

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indicate that be it peace, political conflict, or war-making, these cannot run without women's participation and support (Gonzalez and Kampwirth 2001). Relatedly, the memory archives of 20th-century conflicts also make it amply clear that the experiences of men and women in conflicts are gendered in nature. In other words, women experience conflicts differently as compared to men. Sexual violence against women, for instance, has been a common, if not unavoidable feature of conflicts (Chinkin 1994), including in Kashmir. Even though men too are subject to sexual violence in conflicts, the rationale for men being the targets of such violence may differ from that used for women. Cynthia Cockburn (2013: 434) explains this difference in the following words:

A woman who is raped in war is raped as *a woman*, a despised category. A man who is raped is assaulted as a man, to reduce him to the status of a mere woman, and thus destroy his masculine self-respect. (emphasis added)

In Kashmir's case, survivor testimonies have indicated that "interrogation techniques" by the Indian armed forces have included electric shocks to their genitals, forcible performance of sexual acts on others, and rape, thus confirming that men too have been the targets of sexual violence (Hoenig and Singh 2014).<sup>4</sup> These instances of male sexual violence in Kashmir, however, are not as well-documented as those of violence against women, owing to heightened stigma and shame. At the same time, there is comparatively significant reportage available on instances of sexual violence, including rapes, against women largely committed by the Indian armed forces, since the beginning of the armed insurgency in Kashmir in the late 1980s. Apart from gendered experiences, the wars of the 20th century—for example, in the Balkans and Rwanda—have provided us with historical knowledge that men and women become targets of sexual violence because of their ethnic or national identity too. This is why, systematic rape in the context of war was categorised as a "war weapon" (Kohn 1994: 199)—a tactical tool that is used not only to harm and dominate individuals, but also their communities.

Against the background of these preceding conceptual frameworks, this article aims to analyse sexual violence against women in Kashmir in light of the law and policy developments of the 20th century, particularly those that have occurred in the post-Balkan Wars period. The first part of the article aims to examine how sexual violence in Kashmir is significant, particularly in view of the changed and strengthened human rights policy on sexual violence in conflicts after the Balkan Wars. The second part, while referring to instances of sexual violence against women in Kashmir in general, engages with the drivers of conflict-related sexual violence against women and their application in the Kashmir context. The third part highlights, how, because of a distinct import of sexual violence in conflict zones, the state's international human rights obligations are implicated.

### From Regrettable Excess to Crime against Humanity

Sexual violence in conflict zones is a long-existing phenomenon. An all too well-known, yet partial list that is still fresh in popular memory includes the close to 60,000 rapes of

Bosnian women in the former Yugoslavia (1992–95), 40,000 in Liberia (1989–2003), 2,00,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (since 1998), and a staggering 1,00,000–2,50,000 rapes committed just within three months of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (UN Outreach Programme on the Rwandan Genocide 2018). Rape, however, has often been used as a euphemism for sexual violence in conflict. At the same time, historical evidence from victim accounts illuminates how women suffer such violence in forms including and other than rape, for example, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and sexual humiliation among others (Leiby 2009). This enhanced understanding of the nature of conflict violence that women are subject to, has led to gradual law and policy developments. For instance, the United Nations (UN) acknowledges this broader strain and context of violence as "Conflict-related Sexual Violence," (CRSV) rather than confining it to the commonly used, "wartime rape."<sup>5</sup> The term "wartime rape" refers to the context of an "armed conflict," which is a legal term for war—whether declared and acknowledged or not. This may involve fighting between states, or between states and armed groups (Non-International Armed Conflicts [NIACs]). Jurisprudential tests and legal thresholds are used in order to ascertain that the latter variety of conflicts are NIACs and, thus, will involve application of international laws of war (read expanded protections and accountability for violations of rights of civilians including women) (*Prosecutor v Dusho Tadic* 1999; Vite 2009).<sup>6</sup>

It is, therefore, not surprising that states, including India, try to avoid conflicts being categorised as NIACs. In order to elude international scrutiny and accountability, they would rather refer to such conflicts as an internal strife at best. In Kashmir's case, for instance, the Government of India's declared position at the UN is that no international or NIAC exists (Ministry of Women and Child Development 2013). This contradicts the existence of heavy militarisation in Kashmir and the continuation of special security laws that grant extensive powers and immunity from prosecution to the armed forces. Nonetheless, the prevention and protection of CRSV involves broader state responsibility for upholding human rights, as it pertains to a strain of sexual violence that is "directly or indirectly linked to a conflict," which need not be an "armed conflict" in the aforementioned technical sense (UN Secretary General 2017). In any case, as has been argued elsewhere, a conflict or a "conflict zone" is also a spatial or political concept that is capable of many revisionist possibilities and interdisciplinary interpretations, and may not necessarily be confined to legal technicalities (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009).

Hence, the protective ambit of the concept of CRSV seeks to include prevention and prohibition of "incidents or patterns" of sexual violence, including "rape," or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity against women, men or children, occurring in "conflict or post-conflict settings or situations of political strife" (UN Secretary General 2010). This highlights that human rights policy does not mandate legal and or strategic interventions by the state until such violence escalates to a certain (grave) magnitude; and an incidence–conflict nexus is what sets this strain of violence apart, say, from sexual violence

ordinarily suffered by women qua women alone, that is, rape as an exercise of masculine power and dominance over women. The incidence–conflict nexus is visible in the profile of the perpetrator (state or non-state actor) and the survivor/victim's membership of a group, often within “a climate of impunity” to make it context-specific (read conflict-related) sexual violence, and not mindless male sexual aggression run amok (UN Secretary General 2010). Therefore, experiential knowledge of sexualised violence against women in conflicts clarifies that they are targeted not only because they are women, but because they are *certain* women—it becomes an act of intersectional discrimination implicating gender, ethnic, and national, etc, identities—a cause for international human rights law concern (Pitaway and Bartolomei 2001: 27).

Before the conflicts of the 1990s—like the Balkan Wars—sexual violence, unlike other forms of conflict violence, such as murder or torture, was often dismissed as a by-product of wartime activity, as “collateral damage” (Brownmiller 1975: 31). It was frequently downplayed as a private (sexual) act of soldiers (the boys-will-be-boys argument), or was being outrightly denied (this never happened). For example, Peruvian army commanders in their counter-insurgency operations against the Shining Path called it a “necessary excess” (Brownmiller 1975: 31). Radovan Karadzic—now convicted, among other crimes, for the Srebrenica massacre by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia—is quoted to have dismissingly stated that of the few cases of rapes by Serb soldiers that he knows of, they were “*not organised*, but [were] done by psychopaths” (Iacobelli 2009: 270). With reference to an incident in Kashmir, an Indian army officer was quoted as stating in a similar, flippant vein: “A soldier conducting an operation at the dead of the night is unlikely to think of rape when he is not even certain if he will return alive” (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights 1993: 17). It was soon realised that it is this acceptance, dismissal, or condoning of rape as an inevitable aspect of conflicts that lends itself to be utilised as a “weapon of war” in an armed conflict context, and as a political tool no less in conflict situations other than that of the armed variety (Cockburn 2013: 441). Therefore, this dismissiveness and resultant lack of accountability for violation of rights had to be addressed by gender and ethnic identity sensitive policy changes.

The events of the Balkan Wars and the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s, therefore, in particular, redefined the way sexual violence against women in conflicts has come to be understood. The carefully garnered evidence in the former Yugoslavia, for example, revealed that Bosnian women were raped as a project of ethnic cleansing and humiliation, and as a “weapon of war” (Russell-Brown 2003: 364). Among other motivations, women were raped so that they become impregnated with Serb babies in furtherance of the Serb national project of creating a Greater Serbia (Russell-Brown 2003: 364). The rapes of Tutsi women in Rwanda were systematically carried out as an act of genocide to breed out the Tutsi people in the country (Alvarez 1998–99: 359).<sup>7</sup> Due to media attention received by the horrors of this violence, coupled with feminist lobbying, conflict rape, when committed systematically in the

course of armed conflicts, came to be recognised as a crime against humanity, war crime, and also as an act of genocide before international courts (Park 2007: 13).<sup>8</sup> These developments changed the way sexualised violence and rape in conflicts is perceived worldwide. Given this heightened understanding that ethnic and national identity is often central to the violence suffered by women in conflicts to now refer to this violence as a regrettable by-product of wartime, or conflicts, or as an isolated event of aggressive male sexuality is to speak of it cursorily. Understanding sexual violence against women in Kashmir has to be placed within this broader continuum of historical, legal, and policy transformations.

### Kashmir in the CRSV Framework

A brief sketch of the incidence, nature and extent of sexual violence in Kashmir will help place things in perspective in relation to the preceding discussion. Since the outbreak of the conflict in the late 1980s, such violence has regularly been reported. Of the conflict-related rapes reported from Kashmir, an overwhelming number indict the Indian armed forces.<sup>9</sup> Rapes by militants, although rare, have also been reported; however, as has been noted elsewhere, the armed forces as the representatives of the state violate human rights, while militants violate law (Varadarajan 1993: 5). Unsurprisingly, an accurate estimation of the number of rapes in Kashmir is difficult to obtain. But, the information available indicates that the practice is regular. A 2006 Médecins Sans Frontières study on rapes in Kashmir found that the number of people witnessing or hearing of a rape between 1989 and 1990 was far higher than that in high-intensity conflicts like in Sierra Leone or Sri Lanka (Médecins Sans Frontières 2006). Eighteen documented cases of rapes by Indian armed forces ranging from the Jamir-Qadeem, Sopore case in 1990, to the Gujjardora-Manzgam case of 2011 have been recorded (Kazi 2014: 14).<sup>10</sup> The most frequently cited examples, however, remain the mass rape of Kunan Poshpora, the Handwara and the Mubeena Gani rape cases. In the Kunan Poshpora village, during a cordon and search operation, about 800 soldiers of the Indian army gang-raped between 20 and 60 women. Ages of survivors ranged from 13 to 60, including a young pregnant woman, who later delivered a baby with a fractured arm (Batoool et al 2016: 82; Jha 2013). In 2004, in a village in Handwara, a mother and her 10-year-old daughter were raped by a major of the Rashtriya Rifles (Peer 2016: 200–02). Mubeena Gani, a young bride, was raped by a group of Border Security Force (BSF) personnel on 16 May 1990, the evening of her wedding, when she was on her way to her husband's house with the groom's entourage (Varadarajan and Joshi 2002).

These instances provide an indication of the prevalence, nature and scale of the rapes in Kashmir. However, these parameters, too, have to be placed within the crsv paradigm mentioned above to understand their salience in a particular context. It has been argued that prevalence and scale (quantitative information) of rapes and sexual violence may no longer be the sole compelling methodological driver for provoking human rights interventions at the state or international levels.

It is now thought that even isolated incidents of sexual violence (quantitative information) when complemented with contextual factors (qualitative information), such as conflict history, politics, and motivation of perpetrators, will warrant legal action and protection, even at the international level (Boesten 2017: 506). Scale assumes significance when sexual violence occurs in mass numbers during armed conflicts, as part of a systematic policy, and can be prosecuted as crimes against humanity or war crimes (Meron 1993: 424). Otherwise, even sporadic, regular incidents of sexual violence necessitate stricter enforcement of human rights guarantees, better preventative measures, and stringent accountability mechanisms and outcomes, if the victim and perpetrator profiles remain unchanged within a charged political context, and the incidence–conflict nexus is established, as described above (Boesten 2017).

### Women's Bodies as Symbols of the Nation

Even though sexual violence is a gendered violation committed against women qua women, the evidence from the conflicts since the 1990s brought to cognisance that *certain* women suffer sexual violence by *certain* men for particular purposes (MacKinnon 1993: 64–65). In the case of Bosnia and Rwanda, this kind of violence was inflicted for annihilation of the group to which the women belonged, forced impregnation and genocidal rape being the modus operandi for achieving this end. In other conflicts, where mass, systematic rape as a weapon of war may be absent, sexual violence becomes a tool of achieving political goals, namely control and repression.

Scholars have tried to explore the rationale behind the deployment of sexual violence as a tool to further political ends in conflicts. Ruth Seifert (1996: 39) observes that, in many cultures, women are viewed as an embodiment of the nation, in which case, the rape of the women of a community is meant to be the “symbolic rape” of their entire community. This symbolic association of a community’s women with their nation’s essence is used for a specific function in a militarised imaginary: For instance, it has been argued that the position of a woman as a mother is a dominant symbolic imagery that becomes visible in conflict situations (Mookherjee 2008: 36). In other words, the woman is “encoded” as the “collective womb” of the nation (Raven-Roberts 2013: 50). That being so, the “physical and emotional destruction” of women of a nation, functions as a vicarious “rape of the body of that community” which is employed in undermining the morale and strength of the community (Seifert 1996). This sense of “violation” of the community is compounded by the physical, social, and psychological effects the violence may have within the particularity of a social setting.

The detailed impact of this in Kashmir’s context can be garnered by some of these examples. A report by the Centre for Policy Analysis (CPA) on the Kunan Poshpora case highlights the general and long-term social and psychological implications of sexual violence for women in Kashmir (*Kashmir Times* 2018). The report highlights that women from Kunan Poshpora have faced strained relations in their martial homes and ostracisation from a deeply patriarchal society,

which treats women as an embodiment of family “honour,” and violation thereof amounts to the loss of such honour. In a context where loss of virginity and consensual or forced sex outside of marriage is stigmatised, expectedly, unmarried women from these villages, who have, or are presumed to have suffered sexual violence, cannot find suitors after the incident of a mass rape. The report also details that these women suffer from trauma, physical ailments and many have had to undergo hysterectomies as a consequence of the violence (*Kashmir Times* 2018). By losing their capability to provide reproductive labour, which is one of their primary functions in a patriarchal imaginary, an additional variety of isolation from the community is foisted upon them. In another instance, in the case of Mubeena Gani mentioned above, even though her husband, resisting social pressures, did not abandon her after the rape, the couple were ostracised by their relatives and villagers who were ostensibly influenced by ideas of purity and pollution before and after rape (Peer 2010: 149).<sup>11</sup> Often, thus, the isolation of the survivor or her family begins within close kinship and community ties, where “honor takes precedence over victimhood” (Bhasin Jamwal 2017). The social, psychological, and physical consequences of this violence, therefore, result in the “shattering” of its victims and “driving a wedge through the community” (MacKinnon 1993: 66), thereby fulfilling the militaristic goals of control and domination of a community by weakening its constituents.

Women also become targets of sexual violence in being primarily identified as sympathisers of dissidents and, hence, “subversives” by association or through lending support. Cynthia Enloe (1990: 1) refers to this category of militarised rapes as “national security rape”—a form of sexualised violence inflicted to punish and humiliate “subversive” women for what are perceived as threats to national security. This may be due to their direct or indirect support or participation in a “subversive” movement, or through their relationship with “subversive” men. A Human Rights Watch report detailed these types of rapes in Kashmir where women were targeted for being militant sympathisers, or became targets in reprisal attacks after a militant ambush (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights 1993: 1). In this form of violence, therefore, sexual violence is inflicted on women in their primary capacity as sympathisers and, hence, “subversives” by actual or perceived association.

Additionally, as Catherine MacKinnon (2006: 223) has argued, rape in conflicts is also used as a “humiliation rite” by perpetrators for the men on the opposing side, by appealing to their failure to “protect” their women. In this manner, women’s bodies are encrypted as vessels through which masculine messages of “rape as exercise of power” by the perpetrator are transmitted to the men on the opposing side. Although this can be true for rapes of women by armed forces in any set of circumstances, certain survivor accounts make this argument particularly cogent. For instance, during personal interviews of rape survivors in Kashmir, many of the respondents stated that they had been “raped in presence of their own families, their own husbands, and their own children” (Kazi 2014: 14). Rape as a spectacle, particularly assumes the character of a “humiliation rite” since

women are stereotypically associated with a “need for protection” and men with providing that protection. Such associations underlie sexual violence and rape being used in this manner as a tool of domination (Enloe 1990). Relatedly, the inability to “rescue” and “protect” the women evokes a sense of “emasculatation” (in masculinity terms) in the men of a community. A reservoir of emasculated men, through this and other forms of everyday humiliation in a conflict zone, may tend to have long-term societal effects. For example, it has been argued that this can be a contributing factor behind increased domestic violence against women within that region (Amnesty International 2004: 18). Such a community’s aggravated, and helpless men are able to project a sense of power where they are most able to—in their homes.

The emphasis on women being targeted for sexual violence because of their national or ethnic identity may not necessarily mean that women lose their subjectivity as women, that is, crimes against them in their capacity as women may not become secondary to crimes against their group. Rather, this parameter—that of their identity—has to be an additional feature in calibrating responses to sexual violence. Rhonda Copelon (1995: 197) proposes that “Surfacing gender,” that is, acknowledging the importance of their gender alongside the significance of their identity in theorising sexual violence against women in conflicts may help to take care of subjectivity as a concern.

### **Immunity, Impunity, and Elusive Justice in Kashmir**

The juridical backdrop against which sexual violence takes place in Kashmir has been referred to as a “legal civil war”—a situation where the operation of immunity laws, like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1990, enforces an indefinite “state of exception” or emergency, and has an impact on everyday lives and processes of justice (Duschinski 2009: 692). This means that due to the legal immunities afforded to the armed forces, any reporting and redress of sexual abuse is stonewalled. One of the key contributory factors behind this lack of access to justice is that any prosecution of armed forces by civilian courts involves seeking executive sanctions, which are never granted (Amnesty International 2015: 27). Usually, in situations of extreme public pressure, court martial proceedings may be initiated, as was done in the Handwara rape case, for instance. However, these have been severely criticised for falling short of international standards of fair trial and natural justice. Additionally, the process is inaccessible and opaque for victims, and has been condemned for treating perpetrators too leniently (Gazala Peer 2016). Pertinently, in the Handwara case, the Supreme Court had ruled that court martials could not be subject to the superintendence of the high court, hence reinforcing their nature as impervious and inscrutable forms of justice (*Union of India and Others v Major A Hussain*: 1998).

Within such a constraining legal apparatus and a judicial process that is unresponsive to restoration of rights and accountability, a survey of the state’s response to prominent cases of sexual violence in Kashmir becomes important. These will help illustrate the applicability of the crsv paradigm in the

Kashmir context. In the case of the Kunan Poshpora rapes, the state’s initial response was to deny that the incident had ever occurred. The inquiry by the Press Council of India, a non-judicial body, three months after the rapes, exonerated the army, by discrediting victim testimonies, finding contradictions in their statements, or downplaying what had happened to them, by stating that these “abrasions are common among Kashmiris” (Press Council of India 1991: 146). They termed their narratives as “tutored” and “coerced,” while calling the incident a “massive hoax” (Press Council of India 1991: 146). Independent judicial enquiries observed that normal investigative procedures were ignored in this case, indicating the state’s active attempt to brush the incident under the rug (Noorani 1991). After reinvigorated efforts by Kashmiri women to revive the case, in 2011, the State Human Rights Commission ordered the reopening and investigation of the case, followed by a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) High Court asking for compensation to survivors and monitoring of the investigation (Masood 2014). Even though, in an unprecedented move, the high court ordered compensation, the Supreme Court has stayed further proceedings in the case as on date (Masood 2015). Similarly, because of the state’s efforts to thwart a fair investigative procedure in the rapes of Asia and Neelofer in Shopian, it has been termed as a cover-up (Fazili 2014). A Yale Law School (2009) report has also noted that despite litigants approaching courts against armed forces in cases including rape, not a single conviction has been achieved, spawning a culture of impunity for such and other forms of human rights abuse.

Given this impunity and the vulnerabilities of Kashmiri women to sexual violence in a charged political context in the ways described above, a redefinition of the concepts of “accountability” and “redress” needs to happen within a crsv paradigm. This would involve a feminist redefinition of the concept of “security,” which requires the bringing about of an absence of military, economic, and sexual violence particular to women (Tickner 1992: 66). This position accommodates the broader concept of “human security” that emphasises guaranteeing freedoms, dignities, and “absence of fear” to individuals such that they can develop their potential fully (UN General Assembly 2012). A critical feminist understanding of “human security” also acknowledges intersectional identities of women involving their gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc.—identities that underlie conflict violence against women (Hudson 2005). Considering these, it was thought important that women in conflict situations need special human rights protections, so that state behaviour and structures do not make it impossible for them to achieve the end of “developing their potential fully.” This is why Security Council Resolution 1325 was passed, which recognised the specific effects of war and conflict on women and called on states to take measures to prevent sexual violence, apply international human rights law, and end impunity in cases of sexual violence (UN Security Council 2000). These cannot happen unless structures of immunity, impunity, and denial continue to thrive. The crsv paradigm also mandates that the rights of women to equal protection under laws and access to



justice be ensured in a conflict setting. This is currently elusive in the absence of a comprehensive approach to ending impunity for CRSV (UN Security Council 2008). Besides, international legal policy acknowledges that when sexual violence in conflict is used against civilians, it impedes just resolutions to conflicts in the first place (UN Security Council 2010).

Furthermore, the institutional response to sexual violence in Kashmir also needs to be seen within the larger framework of the tripartite human rights obligations of the state: the responsibilities to “respect, protect and fulfil” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018). The obligation to “respect” means that states must refrain from interfering with or curtailing human rights. The obligation to “protect” requires states to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses, committed either by its own representatives or by private actors. The obligation to “fulfil” means that states are mandated to take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights, including existence of robust institutions, and accountability mechanisms to ensure access to justice. When CRSV occurs in Kashmir and is followed by the lack of meaningful redressal mechanisms, these fundamental tripartite human rights obligations of the state towards the survivors remain unfulfilled. This is exacerbated by the fact that official apathy and even acquiescence is evident through certain recorded instances, for example, military authorities terming sexual violence by armed forces in Kashmir as a “regrettable excess,” or soldiers recorded to have acknowledged that they

were ordered to rape (Kazi 2014: 29). This scenario seriously calls into question the current mechanisms of redress, as well as underscores the need for placing sexual violence in Kashmir within the perspective of global debates and transformations on human rights policy on CRSV, which treats both gender and national identity-based targeting of women as a matter of international concern.

## Conclusions

Despite sexual violence being pervasive in conflicts, it had often been underplayed as an atrocity. At the most, it would be described as a personal act of soldiers. The law and policy transformations of the 20th century, however, have changed that. This portrayal is now not only considered narrow and depoliticised, but it is seen as ignoring how sexual violence can be and is deployed in conflict situations to fulfilling political goals. The learning from past conflicts has given rise to the CRSV paradigm, which encompasses this understanding and helps adequately evaluate institutional responses to such violence once it occurs. In the Kashmir case, hence, we need to call this violence by its rightful name, and gauge institutional responses within the paradigm. The fact that the state responds to such violence with *de facto* and *de jure* immunity, therefore, would go directly against the intent and directive of its mandate. As Brownmiller (1975: 31) has argued, men do not rape because they can, but because they are explicitly or implicitly encouraged to do so.

## NOTES

- 1 A more complex analysis of militarisation, however, understands it through its involvement of, and impact on, society and institutions. In that sense, it entails discursive and material processes through which societies prepare for war, including the “shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals.” See Lutz (2002).
- 2 For details of the military’s engagement in civilian life as an avowed policy of counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir, see Anant (2011).
- 3 For an understanding of how the lines between these concepts can blur, see the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990, Section 4(a), and how its operation facilitates this. Any commissioned or non-commissioned officer: “if he is of the opinion that it is necessary so to do for the maintenance of public order, after giving such due warning as he may consider necessary, fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in the disturbed area.” Also see Human Rights Watch (2011).
- 4 In the Kashmiri lexicon, “interrogation” is often used as a euphemism for torture, due to its prevalence in questioning by the armed forces. For details, see Mathur (2016: 16–20).
- 5 “Conflict-related sexual violence” and “Sexual violence” will be used interchangeably hereinafter.
- 6 Sylvian Vite (2009) finds that one of the tests for declaring a conflict as an NIAC is the “collective nature of fighting” or the state being forced to use its army as the police is being unable to deal with the situation “on their own.”
- 7 See particularly the judgment in the Akayesu case where rape was adjudged as a weapon of

war and an act of genocide when carried out systematically against a community in an armed conflict. For details, see Alvarez (1998–99).

- 8 For these and other related changes brought about by international tribunals established after the Bosnia and Rwanda conflicts, see Park (2007).
- 9 In reply to a question in the legislative assembly, the then Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Omar Abdullah, placed the registered number of rapes in J&K between 1989 and 2013 at 5,125. The number of rapes by state forces far outnumbered rapes by insurgents. Besides, abuse by armed forces as representatives of a state invites international legal obligations, like enforcement of human rights, which are not enforceable against insurgents, who violate law, not human rights (Abbas 2013).
- 10 For the whole list of cases, see Kazi (2014).
- 11 Basharat Peer provides comprehensive details of Mubeena Gani’s rape, as well as her life afterwards.

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# Dimensions of Sexual Violence and Patriarchy in a Militarised State

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Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence have characterised Indian military operations in Kashmir. Of these, sexual violence has been used widely to “break” individuals and communities, and as a tool for punishing resistance against violence by the Indian state. The discourse around sexual violence, however, has always revolved around women with very little focus on men and transgender persons, given the patriarchal understanding of sexual violence and power relations. A critical part of this discussion is also looking at how the patriarchal structure of the society acts as a facilitator for the effective use of sexual violence as a tool against the people. The sexual violence that is propagated and implemented by a masculine patriarchal state can be resisted well with a deeper understanding of gender dynamics.

Kashmir's armed struggle has been a matter of serious concern for the Indian state that has been claiming Kashmir as its own “integral part” contrary to the political aspiration of many Kashmiris. The embarrassment caused to the world's “largest democracy” by the movement for self-determination and the resistance to military occupation by the people of Kashmir has been retaliated with extreme violence and gross human rights violations. In different cycles of both armed and civilian resistance, hundreds have been injured, killed and maimed as a result of direct physical violence perpetrated by the Indian state and there has been absolute impunity for these crimes (Human Rights Watch Report 1993a). People across divides of age, religion and gender have protested against the away occupation in Kashmir. While researching and writing about the human rights violations in this region that are widely believed to be the result of military occupation and army operations against armed rebellion, the wide use of sexual violence by the armed forces—that remain protected by the guarantee of legal immunity under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958—cannot be overlooked.

Sexual violence has effectively been used as a weapon to crush resistance and break the morale of people across the world in conflict zones. In Kashmir also sexual violence has been used as an important part of strategy for crushing support to the popular armed rebellion in Kashmir. The families of militants, mostly women, have been attacked but the families of non-combatants and civilians have been victims and survivors of this violence too. It is usually incorrectly assumed that sexual violence is used against only women. Men have equally been victims of a sexualised form of violence. However, the motive behind perpetrating sexual violence against men is distinct from sexual violence against women (Kazi 2008).

## Gendered Shades

Sexual violence against women by men is not about a male desire for sexual gratification, but is a proven assertion of sexual power to subjugate, given the unequal power dynamics between genders in the society. Many cases of sexual violence committed by civilian men against women end in the woman being killed or mutilated, proving that aggression and a display of masculinity forms the basis of motivation for such crimes. Coupled with the social structure where the blame and shame is directed towards the victim, sexual violence against women becomes an instant tool to break a woman's sense of self, forcing her into victimisation (Bhugra and Kalra 2013: 244–49).

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Sexual violence against women that manifests in the context of militarisation is immediately a fatal combination of unquestionable power and absolute impunity, as is the case in Kashmir. The institution of military has used sexual violence against women as a tool to punish them and the communities. It is an attack on “collective honour” and not just of individuals and their immediate families but on a collective identity (Human Rights Watch 1993b). In a state of militarisation, the idea of the “other” or the “enemy” is strongly, actively nurtured and thus sexual violence by this “other” is seen as an aggression against the entire community. Kashmir’s history is replete with examples of how the Indian state through its armed forces attacked the entire Kashmiri community. In 1991, a unit of the 4th Rajputana Rifles of the Indian armed forces raped women inside their homes in the twin villages of Kunan Poshpora, while the men were being tortured during a cordon and search operation. This was meant as an attack not just on the “honour” of the people of these villages, but on the entire Kashmiri community, that has been supporting the armed struggle against the Indian state, as a representative action that could break a whole community (Batool et al 2016).

There are other manifestations of this state-sponsored sexual violence too, ranging from everyday harassment on streets to trying to embarrass women during search operations by displaying their undergarments to outright rapes of individual women and collective mass rape (Qadri and Haziq 2016). Merely limiting the violence to rapes or penetration would result in negating the everyday experiences of thousands of women by institutionalised violence that has the support of impunity. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual violence as

any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (Krug et al 2002: 149)

### Of Impunity and Denial

Sexual violence follows the impunity that the Indian armed forces have in Kashmir under the protection of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). The AFSPA was passed in some states of India on 11 September 1958, but it was extended to Kashmir in July 1990. Under this act, army personnel can enter and search to make arrests without a warrant and fire to injure and even kill any individual “suspected” to be acting against law. Fake encounters, custodial killings, civilian killings, detentions and disappearances are a result of the impunity that this act provides to the Indian armed forces (Wani et al 2013: 62). In addition to the impunity that AFSPA grants, there is an extended cover of legal impunity as proven recently when the Supreme Court of India stayed investigations against Major Aditya Kumar, accused of firing on and killing three civilians in Shopian in January 2018 (Soni 2018).

There are only denials against accusations of rape and sexual violence. Till date no accused from the army has been tried in a civilian court, even when there are provisions for them to be tried in such courts for crimes such as rapes, murder and culpable homicide. Even in cases where there have been trials in military court, the accused has merely been suspended from service, as in

the case of Major Rahman, who raped a mother and daughter in Bader Payeen in Handwara in 2004 (Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society report 2015). He was only suspended from service after a court martial and later reinstated (Jaleel 2018). It is abundantly clear that punishment for sexual violence is only an eyewash, intended to deceive people. The Indian armed forces have used sexual violence against women to create a sense of fear among the people, and to establish a norm of punishing people who might support resistance against the state. As in the case of the mass rape in Kunan Poshpora in 1991, the incident was a collective punishment against the villagers for “sheltering militants.” Through violating the bodies of women a message was sent, and not just once, that the community would be broken in any way possible for any act of defiance. These offences have not been limited to just the Indian armed forces, but were used as a tactic by the government-sponsored militia known as *ikhwans* to consolidate their power and instil fear within Kashmiris. Their crimes went unchallenged and unquestioned (Human Rights Watch 1996).

While sexual violence against women in Kashmir has received attention, countless men in Kashmir are also victims of sexual assaults perpetrated by the various apparatuses of the Indian state. Sexual violence works on similar lines of power and subjugation among both men and women, especially in conflict zones, where it is a more explicit weapon against a certain population. Within the patriarchal structure, however, sexual violence against men tends to break an individual, keeping in mind the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Sexual violence against men, mostly boys, is also a reality in both conflict and non-conflict zones, but is mostly neglected as it is erroneously perceived to be a rarity (Kapur and Mudell 2016: 11–14). This fact further complicates the gender equations underlying the idea of why sexual violence is prevalent and perpetrated. Gender relations in sexual violence are seen mostly as men perpetrating violence against women, but the vulnerability of men to sexual assault in conflicts results in both men and women being victims. Sexual violence against men in conflict areas like Kashmir has been used mostly as a torture technique; being sexually violated has been reported as a routine by those who have been detained by the Indian armed forces. Common techniques include mutilation of genitals, forced sodomy or insertion of object into the anal canal (Qadri 2016). When used against men, sexual violence is a tool to break the man, to induce a sense of shame and to dent the “masculinity” of the man, so that he breaks into giving what is required of him, or as punishment for defying the state. The sexual abuse, torture, and mutilation of male detainees or prisoners are often carried out to attack and destroy their sense of masculinity or manhood (United Nations report 2002).

A step ahead in this discourse around sexual violence against men and women would be discussing the much ignored sexual violence faced by transgender persons in Kashmir, which is not considered even a remote possibility, given the focus on the gender binary. The transgender from Maisuma, Javed Ahmad, also called Jave Maam is famous for his style of protest. Jave Maam adopted the term *ragda* which became the hallmark of protest sloganeering in the 2008 protests. Jave, like other

Kashmiris, faced sexual violence when he was stripped naked, as a punitive action for protesting (Rashid 2017).

### Patriarchy as an Ally

An understanding and critical research of how sexual violence has been used by states against people in armed conflicts worldwide clearly reflects that sexual violence is an effective tool to break people. Militarisation in Kashmir has led to a climate of impunity and lack of accountability, where people are unable to report or engage with institutions that would otherwise provide respite to them. The low percentage of reporting of cases against the Indian state can be attributed to the fact that a fear of reprisal against the people is common, and there are no precedents of punitive action against the perpetrators. There is no denying the fact that militarisation provides a cover of impunity to its apparatuses, however, a critical ally to the effectiveness of a weapon like sexual violence is the patriarchal structure of the society. The state and the military in itself is a patriarchal institution that covers up morally for its crimes of war by citing patriarchal excuses, especially when it comes to sexual violence. Apologists for the Indian armed forces have used the notion of armed men being jawans, young men who are bound to commit sexual misdemeanour that has nothing to do with the state, but is a commonly accepted aberration of male behaviour. It is an exoneration of perpetrators using what is a universal system of oppression and justifying male dominance and excesses.

The deeper problem is that men seem to use sexual violence when deployed not only in times of war as the "enemy," but also when their role is perceived to be that of protectors. An example of the widespread unchecked sexual abuse by UN peacekeeping forces in Haiti, Cambodia, Congo, etc, against women and minors, proves that combined with a military/armed forces background, sexual violence is bound to be used to terrorise and abuse those who are vulnerable (Anderlini 2017). The state understands the patriarchal nature of Kashmiri society which makes sexual violence effective. An example of this is considering the bodies of women as repositories of "honour," "chastity" and "chivalry" of

men, which, when violated by the enemy, psychologically breaks the men of the community in their failure to "protect their women," a role that patriarchy assigns them (Coomaraswamy 2002).

Similarly, when sexual violence against men is used to break their "masculinity," and to "feminise" them, it is in accordance with the patriarchal notion that a man will not be fit to be a protector and is now "feminised," as in a helpless individual overpowered through infliction of sexual violence. The refusal of men to report or document cases of sexual violence against them for the fear of loss of reputation in the society and a stigma of being mocked as "effeminate" is strong evidence of patriarchy helping the larger occupation. "Men also may be loath to talk about being victimised, considering this incompatible with their masculinity, particularly in societies in which men are discouraged from talking about their emotions" (Sivakumaram 2007: 255). This is similar to the women who are victims of sexual violence, and who would rather not report sexual violence against them from fear of reprisal, given the social stigma attached to rapes and sexual violence. A glaring example of this has been the Kunan Poshpora mass rape in which a lot of unmarried survivors preferred not to be named in legal documents out of fear for their future. The whole scenario of the experiences of transgender persons missing from the broader narrative of occupation is also an example of how as a society we are yet to open up beyond patriarchal gender binary.

The idea is not to exonerate militarisation and occupation as a reason and as a system to perpetrate sexual violence against Kashmiris, but to understand that patriarchy has been effectively used against Kashmiris to break and silence them. Questioning the structures of patriarchy in Kashmiri resistance is important, especially as women and transgender persons have been together in this movement both as contributors to resistance and victims of violence. The recent image of young college girls on the streets, with stones in their hands, should lead the way; they did not merely scare the occupation but broke gender norms to foil a plot and narrative of the Indian state, that of portraying women as victims whose actions are directed and dictated by men.

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# The New Kashmiri Woman

## State-led Feminism in 'Naya Kashmir'

HAFSA KANJWAL

Influenced by the leftist ideals of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, the post-partition state governments in Kashmir sought to empower its women. Scholarly work on this period covers how it was a particularly liberating moment for Kashmir's women. Using an autobiography and oral history, the existing scholarship on the meanings of the "Naya Kashmir" moment for Kashmir's women is critiqued. Even while Kashmiri women were able to benefit from a number of economic and educational opportunities, we must be cognizant of the ways in which the state became the purveyor of patriarchy. One of the shortcomings of this period of state-sponsored feminism was that no indigenous, grass-roots women's movement emerged in Kashmir, given that those working on women's issues in Kashmir were exclusively dependent on the state, which was becoming deeply contested and politicised.

In the last decade of the 20th century, as Kashmir Valley was in the midst of an armed uprising against the Indian state, Shamla Mufti (1928–2008), one of the first female Muslim educationists in Kashmir, published her autobiography, *Chilman se Chaman* (From Darkness to Light) (1994). Mufti was the former principal of the premier Women's College in Srinagar, and was also one of the first Muslim women to receive her master's degree from Aligarh in the 1950s. In the beginning of the autobiography, Mufti states that her target audience is the new generation of girls in Kashmir, a generation whose experience of Kashmir has been refracted primarily through the prism of armed conflict. She desires that this generation learn about their recent history and is afraid that they are being raised without an understanding of the sacrifices and struggles of their predecessors.

Mufti's autobiography is structured alongside three important moments in the history of modern Kashmir. The first, which encompasses the final two decades of the repressive monarchical rule of the Dogras in the state, describes her family background, childhood, and early marital and home life, and speaks to the multiple ways in which she, as a young Muslim female, was restricted both in relation to the Dogras as well as the prevailing conservative norms of the emerging urban, middle-class Kashmiri Muslim society at the time. Mufti was married at an early age, before she completed her schooling, and much of her narrative revolves around how she continued her education and gained employment, despite criticism from her family and her in-laws. The second moment, which arises in the immediate aftermath of partition and Kashmir's disputed accession to India, as well as the rise of the Kashmiri-led National Conference (NC) government, narrates her experiences of obtaining higher education and working in a number of schools and colleges. It traces an "opening" that existed for a number of Kashmiri women, who were able to leave the confines of their homes under the new policies of the state government. Finally, the third moment, which is not covered as much in depth as the other two, provides a brief overview of increasing political instability in the state and its implications for everyday life, including the closures that it enforced on the period of "opening."

While I will briefly address the first and the third moment, it is the second moment—the construction of the new NC state government and its policies for female empowerment—that will be the focus of this article. In doing so, it is argued that state-sponsored feminism—while providing an upwardly socially mobile group of Kashmiri women opportunities for

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education, employment, and mobility—was paternalistic and ideologically motivated in its vision. As a result, no indigenous, independent women's movement emerged in the state, and women's issues became contested and linked to what was increasingly seen by them as an illegitimate rule.

### Building a 'Naya Kashmir'

The NC was an anti-monarchical, left-leaning, secular, nationalist Kashmiri political party that, with the support of the Government of India, came to power in Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, in the aftermath of partition and the accession of Kashmir to India. While the leadership of the NC had links to the Indian National Congress, the party retained a distinct political identity that emerged in the late Dogra period, and was instrumental in formulating a unique brand of Kashmiri nationalism. In 1944, the NC had published *Naya Kashmir*, a Soviet-styled manifesto that sought to pave the way for an independent, modernising, socialist welfare state that would reduce the monarch to a titular figurehead. Addressing the dire social conditions that were prevalent under the Dogras, it incorporated important interventions, including free education, the abolition of landlordism, and land to the tiller.<sup>1</sup>

The manifesto also had an entire section that was dedicated to women's issues. Indeed, the cover of the manifesto, which was on a red background, featured a Kashmiri Muslim woman, Zuni Gujjer, who was an activist in the NC (Whitehead 2017). The use of Zuni Gujjer was no small matter; the party sought to be the voice of the most marginalised in society. On the question of women, the manifesto "advocated equal wages, paid leave during pregnancy and the right to enter trades and professions, to own and inherit property and to consent to marriage" (Whitehead 2017). It also promoted girls' education and opportunities for women's employment.

While Kashmir's political context shifted after 1947, the NC state government, which had approved of the accession to India, still attempted to implement various sections of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, and also struggled to maintain political autonomy for Kashmir. Women's education and later, employment, became a primary target for intervention by the state government as it was committed to creating a citizenry that would be able to take part in the development of the region. One of the important legacies of Sheikh Abdullah's government is the founding of the Women's College in 1950, which was the first institution of higher education for women in the state.<sup>2</sup> In 1953, Abdullah was deposed from power and his successor, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, became the second Prime Minister of the state. He continued to implement the ideals of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto in his project of state building and reform. Thus, using the manifesto as a frame of reference, I refer to the period of state building post 1947 as "Naya Kashmir."

Mufti's autobiography provides an important lens with which to view Naya Kashmir. This is primarily because Mufti's autobiography goes beyond the realm of the political intrigues of Kashmir, and speaks directly to issues of social and cultural transformation within families, homes, schools, colleges and workspaces. Her account, therefore, gives us a

unique perspective of Naya Kashmir that is not found in the existing narratives of the Kashmiri male political and religious leadership of the time.<sup>3</sup> Through her personal observations of the changes in Kashmiri society at this time, we are able to envision the impact of Naya Kashmir on Kashmiri women in particular.

### Historiographical Limitations

The limited historiography on Naya Kashmir covers how it was a particularly liberating moment for Kashmiri women. Shahzada Akhter (2015) writes how the NC upheld women's equality, and involved all sections of society, especially the lower classes, through free education, land reforms, modernisation, and development programmes. Andrew Whitehead (2017) mentions the Women's Self Defense Corps of the NC in 1947 that received training against the invading tribal army from Pakistan, describing the military-style drilling as "a moment of political empowerment just at the eruption of the still unresolved Kashmir conflict." Farida Abdullah Khan (2005: 136) compares the situation in Kashmir with those of other states in India, and says that in contrast with the colonial context of the 19th century, education for women in Kashmir began "under a socialist program rather than by elite groups of philanthropic organisations with their own agenda for women's education ... the goal was ... to produce ... partners in the development and progress of the region and its people and the emergence of a 'new' Kashmir."

Nyla Ali Khan (2010) also notes how the Women's College was an emancipatory forum for women, allowed women to broaden their horizons, and also mobilised women from various socio-economic classes to enhance their educational and professional life. In another work, Khan notes how Begum Akbar Jahan, Sheikh Abdullah's wife, paved the way for the empowerment of women, stepping out of ascribed gender roles to create a presence for women in public life. As women broadened their horizons, Khan (2014: 12) argues that they were "mobilized to avail themselves of educational opportunities to enhance their professional skills and attempt to reform existing structures so as to accommodate more women." Yet, none of these authors provide the broader context for NC's rule: the secular, democratic, "nationalist" NC agenda was also deeply contested in the state due to its ties with the Government of India, and there was a significant amount of coercion that took place in order to maintain its rule, even in the schools and colleges. For example, the fact that Kashmiri women were allowed to vote, as Akhter details, obscures the context that elections in the state were held under the most undemocratic of circumstances, where only NC candidates were "elected" into positions.

While portraying the NC government as being particularly empowering for Kashmiri women, most of these scholars situate the blame for the decline in women's empowerment on the armed militancy in Kashmir. For example, Khan (2010: 115) attributes this to the militancy, given that women's activism in Kashmir was reduced to "their identities as grieving mother, martyr's mother or rape victim." She also mourns this period as one in which civil society voices were relegated to the background and dissenting voices were clamped down on, giving

the impression that such a clampdown did not exist earlier when Abdullah was in power.

Both Krishna Misri and Rita Manchanda, who have also written on the relationship between gender and the Kashmir conflict, concur with this assessment. For example, Manchanda (2001) argues that in the recent past, the pro-freedom groups have instrumentalised Kashmiri women, using them for their propaganda purposes. Misri (2002: 25) suggests that the “post-independence era opened new vistas for the emancipation and empowerment of women,” that the “new political and institutional milieu encouraged women to look forward to the future as equal partners in the reconstruction of the socio-economic matrix,” and that Kashmiri women became partners in the struggle to create a greater political consciousness as well as better economic and educational opportunities for all. As a result, they were able to step out of their usual familial caste and religious identities. The “changing landscape saw them making their own small choices and this was reflected in their dress, demeanor and deportment. Breaking free from purdah, many donned sari which did not symbolize a particular identity then” (Misri 2010: 311). Misri (2010: 311) affirms that “women had come into their own ... Reconstituting themselves, they exhibited confidence to break the shells of stereotype images and projected new images of modern and professional women.” Once more, the “secular” and “democratic” state government is seen as breaking women away from the cultural and religious shackles that bind them, and propelling them towards modernity.

In these analyses, the Kashmiri state before the 1980s had made significant progress in women’s emancipation, as evidenced by increased economic and employment opportunities, a greater presence of women in public life, and the removal of the burqa or purdah. Nyla Ali Khan, Misri, and Manchanda place the blame on right-wing Islamist movements that emerged during the militancy for effectively curtailing the progress that had been made (Khan 2010: 122). Although Misri takes into account how patriarchy reconstitutes itself in male-initiated processes of social change, she does not critically examine the state’s project for Kashmiri women, placing the blame for the lack of women’s emancipation entirely on these male-led Islamist movements.

Far from being a feature of the post-militancy period, however, I contend that the nature of Naya Kashmir’s state-sponsored feminism in and of itself restricted the full potential of women’s emancipatory projects. I want to focus on the ambiguities of the state project and highlight the openings that were created for women at this time, but also note how these openings were curtailed. The attempt here is to sidestep the binaries of empowerment or disempowerment, underscoring both the nature of the state project as it related to women at this concrete historical moment and the multiple effects it had on the ground.

Given that women’s empowerment was intrinsic to the development of a socialist, modernising state, the vision for the “new woman” in Kashmir was linked to, but also separate from the “new woman” that emerged in social reform projects in India and Pakistan, which were centred more on grounding

woman’s spiritual/religious difference from that of her Western counterpart (Chatterjee 1989). As Reza Pirbhai (2014) argues for the case of Pakistan, the non-clerical male leadership affiliated with the Muslim League promoted an ideal for the “new woman” that was grounded in Islamic principles, promising the rights of inheritance, divorce, and property, while also challenging customs like purdah and polygyny.

Nirmala Banerjee (1998) argues that modernisation in Nehruvian India failed to get rid of gender discrimination between men and women because, instead of passing radical economic measures, policies of the post-independence Indian state continued to situate women as targets for household- and motherhood-oriented services. She contends, “challenging the patriarchal ethos of society has never been the agenda of the Indian state” (Banerjee 1998: 2). One important parallel between the Indian case and the Kashmiri case is what Banerjee refers to as the “exclusive dependence on the state” of women’s movements, which “neglected mass mobilization and remained blind to subtle class and patriarchal barriers” (Banerjee 1998: 2). The Kashmir case is still unique as there was no indigenous women’s movement to speak of, or even one that was dependent on the state. The state *was* the movement. Furthermore, the state had no interest in cultivating a new *Muslim* woman as in Pakistan, but rather a new *Kashmiri* woman that could implement the state’s socialist programme for Kashmiri society. Women’s empowerment was, thus, inextricably linked to the ideologies of the new government.

### **Life under the Dogras**

As many scholars have noted, the Dogra period served as an immediate counterpoint to the Naya Kashmir era (Rai 2004; Zutshi 2004). It is, thus, important to recall that the changes engendered by the Naya Kashmir project were occurring in the context of significant illiteracy in the state, especially amongst Kashmiri Muslim women. Under the Dogras, while a small number of Kashmir Pandit women began to get educated, education for Muslim women was lagging. Even by 1941, the literacy rates for Muslims overall were staggering, with only 1.6% of Kashmiri Muslims being able to read and write (Sikand 2002). The statistics for Muslim female literacy were even lower.

The bitter memory of life under the Dogras can be evidenced from the first half of Shamla Mufti’s autobiography. She laments the position of Kashmiri Muslim women in the late Dogra period. Women had little financial independence and had to completely rely on their husbands. Their days were spent in cooking, washing, raising children, and sometimes spinning thread. Parents would worry about their daughter’s marriage, and once a girl was married, she was beholden to her in-laws’ wishes. *Khandani* women, or those with a higher social status, were especially restricted in terms of mobility and access to education. Although some girls from *khandani* families, such as Mufti and her sisters, went to school, this practice was generally considered unacceptable. Mufti narrates how her father received significant criticism from his friends and family for sending his daughters to school. In contrast to some of the reforms made for women’s education in colonial North India,



education for girls was still perceived negatively in Kashmir. Khandani women were primarily restricted to the domestic space.

Mufti describes that from her window she could see the activities of the Hanjis, lower-class families, who lived in boats along the river. Unlike the women of Mufti's family, the Kanji women would be seen walking outside, attending to menial labour. She writes of the intimate social relations that developed amongst the women in the neighbourhood, describing the proximity between the houses and how women would sit at the windows and talk for hours amongst themselves. This closeness enabled women to develop familiar social relations with each other. Yet, Mufti is ambivalent about this closeness, as it also created unwanted interference, gossip, and idle chatter. Mufti attributes this to the constriction of mobility. "Women would remain in their own four walls," she describes, "they were not aware that their land is like heaven" (Mufti 1994: 16–17). She also bemoans the fact that women were largely unaware of what was going on in Kashmir outside of their homes. With restricted mobility, khandani women were only able to go from their in-laws' home, where they lived with their husband and his extended family, to their parent's home, usually with a guardian. On special occasions, they would visit the gardens with their families. Some of the elderly women would also visit the shrines of local Sufi saints or attend sermons held by religious leaders (Mufti 1994: 16). Yet, on the whole, women remained enclosed in their domestic spaces and their activities in the public sphere were limited.

### Women's Educational and Economic Empowerment

After describing the stark state of life for women under the Dogras, Mufti's account marks women's changing roles in society, precipitated by the post-1947 NC government's policies. Mufti recalls how women were increasingly able to challenge, overcome, or negotiate existing gender norms in ways that allowed them to participate in the social and educational realms. The opening of schools and institutions of higher education for Kashmiri women allowed for their active presence in the public sphere. Mehmooda Shah, who was an active female member of the NC, was referred to in Mufti's autobiography, alongside the oral histories of a number of women who attended schools and colleges under Naya Kashmir, as an important figure in the rise of women's education in Kashmir. As a lecturer, and later as principal of the Women's College, she would personally visit Muslim families in the city and encourage them to send their daughters to college.

After working as a teacher for some years, Mufti went on to receive her bachelor's degree from the Women's College at Maulana Azad Road, much to the initial dismay of her in-laws and family. Because of the lack of higher educational institutes for women until the establishment of the Women's College, there were very few Kashmiri women who had obtained adequate education to teach in schools and colleges. Mufti writes that most of the female teachers were from outside Kashmir. The NC government, acknowledging this deficit, began to send Kashmiri women outside the state to receive higher education, promising them teaching positions once they returned (Mufti 1994: 116).

In 1953, Mufti, along with a select few other Kashmiri women, left Kashmir for Aligarh Muslim University. In an act almost unheard of at the time, she left her 10-year-old son, Altaf, with his father and her in-laws in Srinagar. In Aligarh, she completed her master's degree in Farsi within two years and returned to Srinagar.

Upon her return, Mufti was posted as a lecturer of Farsi at the Women's College. She was later transferred to serve as the principal at the Nawa Kadal College, a second women's college that was established in 1960 to serve the population of girls in the Old City. She was at the Nawa Kadal College from 1966 to 1974. Finally, she returned to the Women's College, where she served as the principal from 1974 to 1982.

The founding of the Women's College marked a pivotal moment in Mufti's personal development as well as the development of women's education in the state. The government, she says, "wanted to create a new soul and new life for Kashmir's downtrodden girls" (Mufti 1994: 122). Describing her first day at the Women's College in Srinagar, Mufti recalls:

The college was an awesome building, beautiful gardens, magnificent Chinar ... I saw many girls walking, running here and there. They were all dressed in clean and smart uniforms. Some girls had a hockey stick in their hands ... some were talking about badminton matches. Some went towards the field to play netball. Some girls were coming from the classroom. Some were in a hurry to go to the library. Some had to go to a drama practice and they were running around for that reason. (Mufti 1994: 119)

Mufti's description highlights the variety of options available to female students. Not only were they exhorted to focus on their studies, they were also involved in a variety of sports and in theatre. These activities were meant to increase the students' confidence. The students at the Women's College would also go with their professors to nearby villages or downtown Srinagar for various social service projects.

In a week they would free up two hours to go from house to house in the village. They would bathe the kids, clean the houses, they would pick up garbage from the courtyards, they would give the people in the village lessons on health and cleaning, they would let the women know about how to take care of their health and let the mothers know how to keep their children away from different sicknesses. In addition to this, they would tell them the importance of keeping women educated. (Mufti 1994: 196)

These extracurricular activities played an important role in the government's cultivation of the modern Kashmiri woman. They propagated the emphasis on discipline, service, and a well-rounded personality. All of these qualities were to help women play a critical role in the construction of a Naya Kashmir. By transforming the mentality of the female students, the government envisioned that they would be able to make their inroads into the broader Kashmiri society, as the students would be able to influence their families, relatives, and neighbours. The shift in just a few years, in societal perceptions of women's education and role in society was notable. At home too, Mufti (1994: 129) realised that over time her in-laws also became more accepting of her career endeavours.

The young women were enthusiastic and disciplined, and it appeared that the environment was always bustling with

activity. According to Neerja Mattoo, a Kashmiri Pandit who went on to serve as a Professor of English in the college:

The years from 1950 to the '70s were the kind of years when everything seemed within reach, anything possible with hard work and determination. The achievements of women during these decades were so significant that they altered the gender landscape of schools, colleges, offices, courts, police stations, hospitals, hotels and business establishments. Women were everywhere, making their mark in every field. This revolution had been brought about surprisingly, without there being an organized women's movement in the state. (Mattoo 2002: 164)

Mattoo's reflection of the "surprising" nature of the developments for women without there being an organised women's movement in the state is important. As I will discuss further, the paternalistic attitude of the state creates its own limitations for women.

Through her description of the college atmosphere, we see Mufti ascribing a form of cosmopolitanism to the educational space. Indian dignitaries, including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, would come to the Women's College on their visits to Kashmir. Regular cultural programmes in multiple languages would be held for these important guests. And, yet, it was not just the space of the college that gave the female students more exposure to the outside world. The young women, for the first time, were able to travel to places within and even outside Kashmir. The college would take the girls on field trips and camps. Mufti describes these visits in great detail, including the initial hesitation from families to permit their daughters to travel, the various modes of transportation, and the scheduled activities. The novelty of mobility, especially for girls in that time period, is particularly salient. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, these trips were curtailed, and families were less willing to allow their daughters to venture afar given the prevalence of sexual violence in the region by the Indian armed forces, including the mass rape that occurred in the villages of Kunan and Poshpora (Batoool et al 2016).

Mufti discusses how Bakshi's government soon realised that the school catered to a more elite and upwardly mobile class of females. Many families who lived in the Old City would not send their daughters to the Women's College. In seeking to uphold its socialist and egalitarian vision, the government established a separate Nawa Kadal College in 1961, catering to the population of the Old City. The Nawa Kadal College also held debates, plays, and competitions, to which the girls and their mothers were invited. Mufti stated that the activities held at the college enabled the women in the Old City to think critically about the role of women in society and the importance of education for their daughters. Both the colleges were similar in their efforts to promote women's education in Kashmir. It is evident that this was a time of great improvement for those women who were able to attend these institutions, gain education, and have greater mobility. It was also a moment in which the benefits of education were not just limited to a particular social class.

The state was able to utilise women's emancipation as a way to empower the Muslim middle class, in particular. As a number of scholars have noted, gender is intrinsically linked to class as particular class-based formations have defined ways of being male and female (Sarkar and Sarkar 2008; Banerjee 2004;

Fernandes 1997). Oftentimes, in elite or middle-class formations, the construction of womanhood is relegated to the private and domestic spheres, while manhood is defined in the public sphere. In the post-1947 Kashmir, however, these formations were linked to the socialist ideological underpinning of the state, and demanded a particular political inclination. For the state, the new Kashmiri woman, much like the new Kashmiri man, was educated, progressive, and a secular nationalist. In many ways, the space of the Women's College reflected this gendered construction. The government was in charge of appointing its professors, lecturers and principals; ideally, those it saw as being politically loyal. The individuals involved with the Women's College, as well as a number of other institutions set up by the NC, exhibited a form of Kashmiri nationalism that was not opposed to increasing identification with the Indian state, and suppressed those who argued otherwise.<sup>4</sup>

### **State-led Feminism**

Despite the important shifts in increased opportunities for education and employment for women, our understanding of this time as bringing forth a new era of women's liberation must be tempered. It was certainly empowering for a group of women who were willing to ascribe to a particular brand of Kashmiri nationalism, including those who were close to the leaders of the NC. Even then, their agency was effectively curtailed by the constraints of the paternalistic state apparatus. Those possibilities that were opened up for them were still constructed by the state and were in service to state ideology, what Partha Chatterjee (1989) has referred to as the "new patriarchy" embedded in nationalist movements. In fact, the Kashmir context translates into additional limitations, given the politically coercive and thus illegitimate nature of the state, where any form of opposition, or alternative visions for Kashmir, including those who were pro-Pakistan or pro-plebiscite, were effectively curtailed.

We see a subtle example of this in Mufti's autobiography in her description of her time at the Nawa Kadal College. This college was established for girls in the Old City in Srinagar, so that the Naya Kashmir ideology may also reach them. The politics surrounding the locality of the college, however, was different from the brand of Kashmiri nationalism found at the Women's College. Since a majority of the families that would send their daughters to this college were not members of the bureaucratic class, the students at the college were significantly more critical of India and vocally sympathetic of pro-plebiscite groups such as the Awami Action Committee and the Plebiscite Front.

Mufti narrated an incident in which the female students protested against official Indian presence in the college. In an effort to quash the tension, the Department of Education appointed Mufti to serve as the principal of the Nawa Kadal College. As a Kashmiri Muslim who was originally from that part of town, she was seen as a safe candidate for the position. Nonetheless, Mufti admits that the government had used her; while they appointed her as a principal, they still paid her as a lecturer. Her appointment was purely a political one. Here, we see the paternalistic attitude of the state. Had women's empowerment

been the primary motivation, Mufti would have at least received the salary that was due to her.<sup>5</sup>

This paternalistic attitude was experienced in the Women's College as well. Asmat Ashai and Nighat Shafi Pandit, both sisters who attended the Women's College at the time, spoke of how they resented having to perform during cultural functions in front of Indian delegations, but they had no choice. Pandit recalled how Mehmooda Shah, the principal of the Women's College, would make sure that the female students would attend college on the day that important figures were visiting, including Indira Gandhi, who visited the college a number of times during these years.<sup>6</sup> She remembered having no interest in meeting her, but the punishment for not attending was severe. Neerja Mattoo also mentioned how pro-Pakistan sentiments were suppressed. She recalls an incident when the students were knitting sweaters for Indian soldiers. One girl "raised the slogan for Pakistan ... and Miss Mehmooda slapped her."<sup>7</sup> In addition, the students were not allowed to express any critical views in the school magazines or newspapers on the subject of Kashmir's ties with India, or the NC government. From these examples, we can see the coercive nature of the state, and how women's empowerment was inextricably linked to ascribing to a form of secular modernity and pro-Indian sentiment.

This tension came to the fore in 1973, when the government proposed that the name of the Women's College be changed to Kamala Nehru College, after the mother of Indira Gandhi and the wife of Jawaharlal Nehru. Students from the Women's College, in addition to other students from the nearby Sri Pratap

and Amar Singh colleges, protested the plan to change the name.<sup>8</sup> The female students "smashed the sign board that was installed on the main building of the college," and also pelted stones at Sheikh Abdullah's vehicle as he was arriving at the college to preside over the official function (ud-Din 2017). The protest at the Women's College was important as it revitalised the movement for plebiscite. This incident, however, is remarkably absent from the scholarly accounts that have focused largely on women's unequivocal acceptance of the state government's agenda and subsequent "empowerment."

I suggest here that women's empowerment, though an important aim of Naya Kashmir, became embroiled in the political compulsions of the state. State-sponsored feminism had other goals in mind, including consolidating the power and legitimacy of the state as an integral part of India. Thus, even while Mufti described the many openings that these women benefited from, we must understand them as being reflective, and not independent, of the broader political developments under the NC-led state government. One of the shortcomings of this period of state-sponsored feminism is that no indigenous, grass-roots women's movement emerged in Kashmir, given that those working on women's issues in Kashmir were exclusively dependent on the state. As a result, the mass mobilisation of women's rights groups that arose in a number of other postcolonial societies was relatively absent in the Kashmiri scene. This was to have important ramifications for women's movements in Kashmir in later periods too, as state-led women's empowerment initiatives remain contested given the groundswell of resistance to the state.

## NOTES

- 1 There are debates over the reasons why the National Conference government issued the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto, with some suggesting that it wanted to regain its popularity, which it was losing to its rival, the Muslim Conference.
- 2 Sheikh Abdullah led the Kashmiri nationalist opposition to the Dogra monarchy. He was the first Prime Minister of the state after accession.
- 3 These include the writings of Sheikh Abdullah (Prime Minister) and Syed Mir Qasim (Chief Minister), as well as the writings of Munshi Ishaq, the former head of the Plebiscite Front, and Qari Saifuddin, the former head of the Jamaat-i-Islam.
- 4 The autobiography is largely silent on these contestations, except in the section where Shamla Mufti discusses how her appointment was a political one, to quell the level of distrust that existed in the community. Here, I also draw upon my conversations and oral interviews and an understanding of the broader aims of the state project.
- 5 While Mufti does not use the term "paternalistic" in her autobiography, she does describe her disappointment with what happened. She did feel that she was just a political appointee, as the neighbourhood would be more amenable to having a Kashmiri Muslim as the principal.
- 6 Interview with Nighat Shafi Pandit, Srinagar, 5 May 2014.
- 7 Interview with Neerja Mattoo, Srinagar, 24 May 2014.
- 8 This incident is mentioned in detail in Mir Fatimah Kanth's article "Women in Resistance: Narratives of Kashmiri Women's Protests" in this issue of the Review of Women's Studies.

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# Gendered Politics of Funerary Processions

## Contesting Indian Sovereignty in Kashmir

INSHAH MALIK

On 8 July 2016, Kashmiri militant Burhan Wani was killed by the Indian army, setting in motion unprecedented funerary processional grieving. Using accounts of funerals of militants and civilians, gendered funerary processions and the transformation of gendered cultures of grieving in Kashmir have been analysed. It is argued that women's participation in the militant and civilian funerary processions is a feminist political formulation in the Kashmiri context. This is understood through a review of the politics of funeral attendance and two specific actions that women undertake: publicising grief by bringing the private out into the contested public realm, thus outdoing religious law, and resisting the state's sovereignty by grieving for lives that the state deems "non-grievable."

In 2016, several huge funeral processions were held for a 22-year-old Kashmiri militant, Burhan Wani. Thousands of people walked several miles from different parts of Kashmir to the streets and alleyways of Tral (Wani's hometown) leading to impromptu mass funeral processions (Qadri and Shah 2016). The mourners were fired upon by the Indian army, killing hundreds of funeral-goers, blinding thousands of mourners, and, in effect, criminalising public mourning (PTI 2016). The entire Kashmir Valley would be threatened by cyclical targeted violence for several months to come. The colossal moment of Wani's death and many of these spectacle funeral processions that followed, raised questions about the nature, culture, and history of public mourning in Kashmir, and challenged the cogency of the Indian state's sovereignty claim (Mathur 2016). Why were so many people willing to die just to be able to mourn someone whom the Indian authorities had declared a "terrorist?"

The answers that were offered by the Indian government were mostly inadequate. The national media kept circulating the state's official stance of holding Pakistan responsible for a mourning that was essentially indigenous. The Indian media repeatedly informed us that Pakistan was implanting ideologies of terrorism, which created troubled and dangerous people like Wani and those who were grieving his death (Hindu 2016). The mourners were dubbed as misguided juveniles or deemed to be under the influence of foreign propaganda. However, these assertions were insufficient, because they offered no understanding of how such political figures were fashioned and why those grieving for them encountered fatal violence at the hands of Indian troops? Moreover, the complexity of the situation was visible when women too, in large numbers, attended these prohibited funerals. All this immediately pointed to the inadequacy of the official narratives.

The moment of Wani's funeral brought to the fore the question of the Indian state's sovereignty and a challenge levied against it by the Kashmiri people to the centre stage, yet again challenging the state narratives about Kashmir politics. Since then, Kashmir has witnessed a drastic increase in the young men taking to arms. The renewed politics of disagreement is shaping another armed resistance and funerals are increasingly becoming contested spaces of power, grief, and mourning. Earlier, in January 2016, when the then Chief Minister and the People's Democratic Party patron, Mufti Saeed, passed away, his funeral attendance became a subject of a rigorous debate. The low turnout of mourners was seen as a symptom of waning political support for pro-India parties in Kashmir.

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On the other hand, huge funerary processions for both militants and civilians killed in police action have become a worrying point for the security establishment. Therefore, when mourning for Wani soared, the state declared it as a sign of rising support for “terrorists” among the masses. The government’s response to the funeral demonstrations was lethal and resulted in the killings and blinding of mourners. Ever since, targeted violence has become a normalised response to public grieving at such sites. The continued normalisation of the violent response to these funerary demonstrations points to a striking identitarian polarisation of public discourse through which the support of ordinary Indian citizenry is garnered by the Indian state. The question that arises is: How do the majority of people in India simply lap up these assertions about grieving Kashmiri people made by the state? What rationalisations are offered by the government about the nature of this grief and what were its justifications about civilian deaths and blinding of children?

In the Indian political culture, which is increasingly becoming defined by its religious identity politics, the question of Kashmir often evokes undifferentiated responses. The Hindu right-wing politicians claim that India’s sovereignty is in grave danger in Kashmir because of the strategic conspiracies hatched by neighbouring Pakistan to divide India. But, contrary to the Hindu nationalists, their liberal or left-wing opponents invoke the law to urge for respecting the human rights of the Kashmiri people. Nevertheless, these different political groups in varying degrees agree that Kashmir is an inalienable part of India. Those trying to hold the Indian state accountable in Kashmir through legalistic means demand that the human rights of the Kashmiri people be respected. But, this fails to recognise the exceptional nature of the military occupation in Kashmir. The unprecedented grief for Wani did not simply raise questions about the legitimacy of the present form of Indian governance, but presented a moment of moral challenge to India’s basic claim to sovereignty in the region.

Thus, in the broader Indian political culture, a Kashmiri has come to signify one who is in a complicated relationship with the state’s sovereignty, to whom the rule of law does not apply and whose political action is labelled as misguided or constituting terrorism (Noorani 2011). Simultaneously, a Kashmiri can be killed but cannot be sacrificed (Zia 2018). A Kashmiri signifies something primitive; a body sans capacities to think and reflect on her political condition. Someone full of vengeance but not patriotic, a body that can be corrupted but not trusted. In the case of Kashmiri militant bodies, the state is taking decisions about who can live and what the political meanings of a liveable life are. When the state makes such a decision about the dispensability of people for strengthening its political claims, it assigns “grievability” to such bodies (Butler 2010). Thus, the media and political class in defence of the state create the distinction between who is to be grieved (soldiers) and who we must not grieve for (in this case, Wani).

The Indian state through regimens and technologies of power creates acceptable forms of citizenship and the Kashmiri bodies—militant or not—are consistently struggling to reject these imposed political frames. The public mourning envisages grief

as a political possibility to register a protest against the order of sovereignty in its current form. Thus, the politics of mourning is a reclamation that signifies a contest for political power, where people who attempt to ascertain their rights demand to share or overtake that sovereignty. The public mourning at funeral sites brings us to acknowledge the deep aspiration for Kashmiri sovereignty and rejection of the Indian state.

### Funerals as Affective Sites of Feminist Politics

At the traditional funeral sites, the gendered division of labour is visible. Women perform obituaries and eulogise the dead in the inner familial circles. They testify if the deceased performed their gendered role to the satisfaction of their kith or kin. This is a political dimension of gendered roles of grief, and it operates in the constituencies of establishing and producing cohesive social bonds or animosities, while keeping ranks and files of a social community in place. The final pronouncement of application of “grievability” is in the hands of women and comes in direct conflict with the state’s claim of sovereignty.

The collective grieving in Kashmir is traditionally assigned to women, but lived culture shows that exceptions to this rule are available. Throughout several decades of strained political conditions, mourning men have become emblems of helplessness signalling emasculation. Grief is redistributed in society by the unprecedented political turmoil engulfing Kashmiri society since the early 1980s. The gendered culture of grieving in Kashmir restricts women to their complementary role as grievers. The Islamic law, as it is applied in Kashmir, is made to prohibit women from attending final funeral prayers at the cemeteries and even forbids the public or prolonged display of grief. Additionally, the state attempts to monopolise women’s gendered traditional role that involves the application of grievability, which translates into determining who deserves to be mourned. The unprecedented deaths under the continued military occupation show the precarious nature of life in general, curtailment of political expression and limitations on women’s agential role. Women work under these limitations and script their own political action in a way that can embolden their voice. The traditional culture of mourning, by itself, limits women’s agency and cannot respond to the realities of a military occupation and does not have a language in which it can process a response to the everyday violence. The localised phrases and idioms of lament remain within the ambit of reflecting upon the gendered roles of the deceased.

When an event like Wani’s death happened, it brought into the open the crises of traditional mourning culture, and people responded by improvising the culture itself. At Wani’s funeral, a widespread redistribution of grief occurred and people, irrespective of their gender, felt overburdened by sorrow. We saw women in large numbers transform the traditional grieving culture into a potent funerary processional grieving for slain militants and civilians. The improvisation of the traditional cultures of mourning involved bringing women’s grief into the public sphere (that was prohibited by the tradition) and then by women grieving bodies (that the state prohibits grieving for). In doing so, they provided a new political cohesion to

their Kashmiri political community, while creating a more progressive role for themselves.

However, other than providing political cohesion, women, as they actively work in public redistribution of grief, also attempt to transform gendered meanings of these political actions. In the requiems and laments, the mourners' invocation of the gendered masculinity of *boi* (brother) in order to refer to Wani reconfigured meanings of familial relationships. How could people call someone whom they do not know in person and had never met, their brother? In doing so, they attempted to transform Burhan Wani from an inaccessible internet icon into an emblem of identifiable masculinity. He was a brother, like any other, who would protect or fight against injustice meted to his vulnerable siblings. He was a brother who fought for and lost his life defending his homeland. When people identified with these qualities of Wani they sought to make him relatable. His extraordinariness was thus scripted in the ordinary idiom of a personal relationship of a brother to make him immediately identifiable. The slogan reverberated in Tral on 9 July 2016, "Tera bhai mera bhai, Burhan bhai, Burhan bhai" (Burhan is your brother and my brother) symbolises this transformation. Without placing Wani in the context of the history of repression in Kashmir, the meaning of this invocation of a "brother" is inaccessible. There is a long history of persecution of young people and, over the years, most Kashmiris have experienced the violent death of relatives, friends or acquaintances. The sudden and unfair nature of political deaths makes Kashmiris recognise the precarious nature of life in Kashmir. It is this affective potential of Wani's body that helps it transcend the masculine meaning of a "brother" in people's slogans and provides symbolic representation to a collective suffering.

### Culture of Mourning and the Grieving Mother

The realignment of the culture of mourning has seen a transformation in traditional symbolic icons of Kashmir's Muslim nationalist movement. The mourning mother as a passive symbol of patriarchal nationalism has long been a contentious subject in feminist theory. Rita Manchanda has noted how the figures of grieving mother and the martyr's mother have become iconic in the Kashmiri nationalist imagination, the public grief of mothers becoming a powerful aesthetic resource of the nationalist conception of *azaadi* (freedom) (Misri 2014). However, in the transformative culture of mourning in Kashmir, mothers make private this very public grief. This was very much visible in the subsequent funeral of Sabzar Bhat, another militant affiliated with Wani's outfit, Hizbul Mujahideen. Sabzar was popular in his village, Rathsun, for his bravery and will to fight against injustice (Naqash 2017). He was killed in an encounter in a nearby village along with 16-year-old Faizan Bhat, a young boy who had dropped out of school in May 2017 and who became part of the group after having successfully snatched a rifle from a Central Reserve Police Force personnel in Tral. In an account, "A Militant's Mother" published in a local newspaper, *Kashmir Life*, Shams Irfan recounts the scene when Sabzar's body arrived at his home, noting about his

mother, "She didn't react at all" amidst thousands of mourners who had gathered in her house. Furthermore, she took away her son's body into her private quarters and grieved by his side, away from the public gaze and in the morning she plainly informed her husband that the time to bury their son had come (Irfan 2017). This account challenges what is taken for granted about mother's grief amidst self-determination movements. Through emphasising the different modes of a mother-son relationship, women's connections to their political community under these political conditions offer them spaces for self-articulation and a chance to demand more freedoms. The account of Sabzar's mother is not a secluded case; there is a pattern visible in many mothers' response to their militant sons' death. The image of a grieving mother is further complicated by the disturbing silence about women as casualties. In 2017, two women, 22-year-old Mysra Bano from Kopwour and 24-year-old Beauty Jan from Shopian both died from gunshot wounds leaving behind their toddler daughters. The iconic images of toddlers left behind engendered the normative ways in which the ethnonationalism of military occupation is understood (Muhammad 2017).

In a compelling interview with Wani's mother, Maimoona, we see a woman who does not publicly display her pain (Amin 2017). She uses discretion, talking intermittently about the recognisable humanity of her two sons, both killed by the Indian army. Similarly, the mother of Faizan Bhat hides her trauma. She tells the journalists that they took a collective decision to donate her son's books and school uniform much before his death, since she was convinced that her son would not return (Ahmad 2017). In the media accounts, militant mothers move away from their traditional victim image to depictions as more robust petitioners. They ask tougher questions about the political conditions prevailing in Kashmir and link their children's lives to the political issues in myriad ways (Nabi 2017). With the shift in the gendered practices of political mourning, between privatising public grief and publicising what tradition asks to keep private, Kashmiri women are piecing together a radical framework that makes possible an even bolder entry for younger women. The contemporary gendered politics of mourning is nestled within a long history of women's resistance in Kashmir.

In April 2017, women from prominent Srinagar colleges came out to break the hegemonic dominance of men in the pro-freedom protests. The violent protests against the Indian state in Kashmir that remained largely a monopoly of young boys, found a rejoinder. Girls donning their school uniforms, headscarves and sometimes long robes thronged Srinagar city roads, armed with stones, taking aim at Indian soldier bunkers and armoured vehicles. They were undeterred by the tear gas canisters and PAVA [Pelargonic Acid Vanillyl Amide] shells that are routinely used to disperse public protests in Kashmir (Ashiq 2017). One of the young militants from Hizbul Mujahideen, Zakir Musa, admonished them for retorting to violence saying "abandon stone pelting; your brothers are alive" (*Kashmir Watch* 2017). These girls made it clear that they were representing their own selves when, despite these warnings,

they continued unafraid, fighting Indian forces at various nooks and corners of Srinagar city (Krishnan 2017). In a photo that surfaced over the internet on 5 March 2018, two women were seen alongside men offering funeral prayers for a young militant. It was a scene that further confirmed a silent feminist revolution that is enabling women to fight both the cultural patriarchy and the military occupation of Kashmir. The photo was not an anomalous event, but the product of a long history of women's political action in Kashmir (*Outlook* 2018).

## Conclusions

The case of women's participation in the militant and civilian funerary processions is a feminist political formulation in the Kashmiri context. This can be easily understood when we review the politics of funeral attendance in two actions that women carry out. They publicise grief by bringing out the private into the contested public realm, outdo the religious law, and

simultaneously resist the state's sovereignty through grieving for lives that the state has designated as "non-grievable."

The expression of public grief in Kashmir shows fractures in Kashmir's relationship with India and brings to the fore a long history of aspiration for Kashmiri sovereignty. Moreover, gendered grieving becomes central to the cultures of public protest, as Kashmiris attempt to uphold a demand for self-determination in the form of a civilian protest against the Indian state. The gendered culture of grieving itself undergoes a transformation to bring out a more robust pro-women politics within the resistance movement. In fact, women understand their complex subjectivity and find ways to contest with different patriarchal forces for political power. They contest the state over their traditional role to grieve for those bodies that the state prohibits and also contest cultural patriarchy over public spaces. The politics of women's mourning symbolises people's moral right to self-determination and women's right to the public realm.

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# Women in Resistance

## Narratives of Kashmiri Women's Protests

MIR FATIMAH KANTH

Media framings of street protests by young women in April 2017 projected them as “poster girls” of women’s resistance to the Indian administration in the region, thereby invisibilising the largely undocumented past of women’s resistance as well as daily acts of survival and dissent. Comparing women’s street protests across two time periods in Kashmir—1964 to 1974, and April 2017—women’s role in the narratives of nationalist and anti-colonial struggles is analysed. The struggle for “self-determination” in Kashmir provides women with a space for active political participation. However, as seen in the creation of women’s protests as “spectacle,” it denies women the opportunity to participate as genuine political actors and decide the terms of their participation.

In late 1973, Chandi Prasad, pioneer of Chipko Andolan, the Indian forest conservation movement, witnessed Kashmiri women standing on rooftops and throwing stones at the police in central Srinagar during a period of intense and valley-wide anti-India agitations sparked off by students of Srinagar Government Women’s College (Guha 2009). He describes it as a *majedar tamasha* (humorous spectacle) (Guha 2009). Four and a half decades later, in April 2017, young female students chanting anti-India slogans took to the streets across the towns and districts of Kashmir to protest against police brutalities. These young women, photographed in moments of aggression and rage against the state, became hyper-visible on digital media platforms.

Responses to these images from both within and outside Kashmir expressed surprise, disapproval, and resentment at the emergence of the “female stone-pelter” and more generally at the presence of young women on the streets demanding *azaadi* (freedom). From Chandi Prasad’s laughing dismissal, to the contemporary characterisation of these protests as “unprecedented,” the history of Kashmiri women’s participation in the resistance movements against the Indian state in the region has often been invisibilised or treated as insignificant.

This paper traces the histories of Kashmiri women’s participation in student-led street protests in two different time periods—1964 to 1974 and April 2017—and reveals the selective amnesia regarding women’s role in the resistance movement within the terrain of social memory in Kashmir. In contrast, I locate the recent protests in April 2017 as a part of the continuum of a largely undocumented and inter-generational history of Kashmiri women’s participation in the struggle against the Indian state, spread over the last six decades. I use media analysis to describe gendered representations of the contemporary student protests, and oral history narratives to recover and contextualise them against the backdrop of the wider history of Kashmiri women’s political agency.

In the final section, I draw on debates and theories of gender and nationalism, to explore why women’s narratives of resistance are rendered insignificant in the social narratives of the Kashmiri freedom struggle. These theoretical debates also help in understanding how gendered relations shape the popular mobilisations and imagination of the struggle. While women of all age groups have played an active role in the movement in the 20th as well as 21st centuries (Gazi 2017; Qayum 1989), the period between 1964 and 1974, defined by large-scale mobilisations

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of students across Kashmir, is a particularly striking historical moment to analyse women's participation.

### Women's Protests as 'Spectacle'

On 15 April 2017, students in large numbers clashed with the state forces, while protesting against the creation of a check-point outside south Kashmir's Pulwama Degree College (Khan 2017). The state forces barged into the college premises, resorted to tear-gas shelling and pellet gun firing to disperse the students, injuring more than 50 of them (Kanwal 2017). Soon afterwards, students from various districts in Kashmir organised protests and marches as a mark of solidarity with the students in Pulwama, chanting pro-freedom slogans and demanding the right to self-determination for Kashmir (Bhat 2017).

Female students participated actively in these protests; at some places leading protests, while at others throwing stones at state forces who were trying to prevent marches and public gatherings. In public, women students frequently articulated their participation against the backdrop of Kashmiri oppression and the wider politics of resisting the Indian state. For instance, in a media report, one student stated that human rights violations committed by state forces pushed her to participate in the street protests, and another explained that while the recent police brutalities at Pulwama may have been a provocation, the "anger is deep-rooted" (Kanwal 2017).

The protests were widely covered in the media: locally, internationally, and by the Indian media (Khan 2017; NDTV 2017). Women students' protests received headline coverage on Indian news channels, like NDTV and AajTak, for days, repeatedly showing looping videos of the protests. Images of women students with their headscarves on and faces covered, caught in the act of stone pelting and sloganeering, were circulated as representative pictures for protests in Kashmir across various media platforms. They also went viral on social media, with many people sharing such pictures. Social media was abuzz with commentary that celebrated as well as criticised the presence of Kashmiri women students on the streets, referring to their willingness to participate in protests alongside their male counterparts.

Indian media's portrayals of these protests by young women were almost exclusively in terms of the "emergence" of a "new phenomenon." News channels like AajTak expressed outrage that even young women were now "radicalised" enough to pelt stones during demonstrations (AajTak 2017). In the local media, these protests were framed in terms of the new generation of Kashmiri women "redefining" political agency, having arrived at a level playing field with men within the resistance movement (Kanwal 2017). The media hype and commentary around the way these young women pelted stones at the police, kicked armoured vehicles, or got into altercations with the armed forces construct them as "poster girls;" exceptional and representative symbols of women's participation in the movement.

One such particularly widely circulated image was that of a group of girls pelting stones at the police, with one of the girls in the foreground holding a basketball in one hand while aiming a stone at the police with the other (Hussain and Saha 2017). The contrast in this image between a student's everyday

life (the basketball) and the exceptional figure of a young woman pelting stones created what Guy Debord analyses as "a spectacle:" "a social relation among people, mediated by images" (1967: thesis 4). This mediated spectacle of young women taking over the streets—a singular moment in history—obfuscated other histories and realities of women's long-standing protests as well as other means of women's resistance to the Indian state (Debord 1967: theses 11, 143). Commenting about the dearth of visual documentation of past protests by Kashmiri women, Khurram Parvez, a human rights defender at the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) stated:

Women massively protested in 2008, 2010. Now the difference is that the girl had a basketball in her one hand and a stone in the other. This was something new that the media harped on. Otherwise, it's not new. In 1950s, '60s, women would come out with sticks. The only difference remains, it is being documented now. (qtd in Gazi 2017)

The power of images to shape emotive responses became clear in the manner in which iconic photographs of young women became popular symbols of the "new" spirit of resistance in the Kashmiri imagination, and threat of "Islamic radicalisation" in the Indian media. However, the circulation and deployment of these images as representative symbols call for a deeper analysis of women's agency as political actors.

### Everyday Resistance and Survival

The media hype around the spectacles of street protests by young women invisibilises everyday acts of resistance by Kashmiri women. The group of girls in the "basketball photograph," when asked about their motivations for pelting stones at the police, said, "We were going for basketball practice, but the forces provoked us into pelting stones by assaulting us. Otherwise we are not stone pelters" (Kanwal 2017). The obsession with the transgressive and gendered act of pelting stones—as reflected by media framings—overshadows the ubiquity of resistance in the daily life of these young women, which van der Molen and Bal (2011) describe as "small" acts of dissent.

van der Molen and Bal (2011: 94) analyse dissent practices among Kashmiri youth, particularly young women against the military occupation, and draw attention to the threat of militarised gendered violence that constrains and shapes these small practices of dissent. For instance, on a regular school day, a walk to the high school basketball court across the militarised urban space of Srinagar, for a young Kashmiri woman, can encompass a range of such public and private dissent practices: from markedly and deliberately crossing the street to avoid walking below a nearby checkpoint they may have to pass, to continuing to play basketball despite the gaze of the Indian soldier from a watchtower close by, or refusing to take off the widely worn headscarf while playing, to evade such a military gaze. These are only some of the many other possible and unstated ways that women in Kashmir adopt to survive and resist.

The beginning of an armed uprising in 1989 ushered in a decade of widespread violence and human rights violations by the Indian state in Kashmir. This is often referred to as the darkest period of contemporary Kashmir's political history. During this period, Kashmiri women's bodies became sites of

both intense militarised violence and also resistance (Batoool et al 2016). As the “picking up” (illegal and arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances) of Kashmiri men and boys by the Indian armed forces became a daily occurrence, women of the neighbourhood would gather in spontaneous protests outside the army camps, demanding the release of their loved ones (Sikander 2011). Announcements from local mosques, specifically requesting the women in the locality to come outside their homes to protest against particular human rights violations and atrocities, were also common (Zia 2017).

These acts of everyday survival, refusal, and dissent articulated by Kashmiri women through the 1990s, become invisible when juxtaposed with spectacles of the “stone pelting” street protests framed as both exceptional and exemplary political resistance by a “new generation” of young women. Societal discussions about women’s street protests as a “never before avatar” of women’s political agency indicate an underlying assumption that women have not played a significant role in the Kashmiri resistance movement (Zia 2017).

In fact, despite the ways in which intense militarisation of the region has constrained Kashmiri women’s lives (Kazi 2009), women have engaged with the popular resistance in creative and passionate ways. Women’s resistance to the Indian state in the region has been shaped by circumstances of time and political context. Street protests by young female students may not have been a constant feature in the last three decades, but, given the varying levels of the intensity of the conflict, which has a direct bearing on women and children, women have hardly been absent from the public space in Kashmir.

The exceptional framing of women’s role in April 2017 as a spectacle, thus, not only disregards the many ways in which Kashmiri women have exercised their agency as political actors by being “rooted in the ordinary” rather than escaping it (Das 2007: 6), but also obliterates the specific political circumstances—intense and violent militarisation of lives in the 1990s—within which Kashmiris have resisted the Indian state across time.

### Hidden Stories of Women’s College, Srinagar

In her book about Moroccan women, Alison Baker (1998: xix) draws attention to the exclusion of women’s contributions in the history of nationalist struggles in Morocco during the 1940s and 1950s: “What men say is called ‘oral testimony’; what women say is just ‘stories.’” The invisibilisation of Moroccan women’s experiences is reflective of the larger absence of women and their views in modern history, which is dominated by men’s consideration of what is worthwhile to remember from the past (Bleiker 2004: 156). Such a system of exclusion also obscures women’s agency as political actors.

In the following section, I reproduce ethnographic narratives from women who participated in the student street protests during 1964–74 to reflect on the ways in which collective social memory and history are constructed in dominant Kashmiri “his”stories of resistance, framed in terms of courage and sacrifice. I also map how absences of recorded history of Kashmiri women’s participation in the resistance movement both worsen and hide such exclusions within the terrain of social memory.

Over the course of several conversations, spanning three weeks, I interacted with Shagufta Qayoom,<sup>1</sup> a 69-year-old retired educationist and former student of the Government Women’s College at Maulana Azad Road (M A Road) about the students’ movement of the 1960s. It was a period of intense cross-border hostilities between India and Pakistan (Operation Gibraltar), which ultimately led to the Indo–Pakistan War of 1965. I have edited and translated our conversation, for the sake of brevity:

In the year 1964, I was enrolled as a student at the women’s college at M A Road. In the last week of May, all the students were asked to assemble in the auditorium for a condolence meeting. We were then told that Jawahar Lal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, had died of a heart attack and we must mourn the sad day.

I asked her about the reaction of the students to this announcement.

The principal stressed that our beloved *Chacha* (Uncle) Nehru had passed away. However, the consciousness among students about the political situation in Kashmir was quite high. We were generally not allowed to express our political consciousness about Kashmir, but in this instance felt forced to mourn the death of an Indian leader. We decided to organise a small-scale protest within the college campus. Our college uniform comprised an all white *kameez-shalwar*. On the first day of the protest, we instead wore green-coloured shalwars and *dupattas* with our white *kurtas*, followed by pink-coloured shalwars and *dupattas* the next day. The staff noticed it immediately, as a huge group of girls was dressed in colours other than the white of their uniform. When asked why we weren’t dressed in our proper uniforms, we replied by saying that our white shalwars are dirty.

She continued:

At around the same time, we had heard news that *mujahids* (fighters) have come from across the border to fight for Kashmir. Huge demonstrations were being organised near the Jamia Masjid, in support of the *mujahids*. We felt that we should also participate in these protests. A group of us marched to the Jamia Masjid, to a friend’s house to borrow *burqas*, so that we couldn’t be recognised in public. At the site of the protest, I remember a tall man asked us to chant slogans that would pierce the skies. We used all our strength to chant slogans and express our support. One of the slogans that I remember clearly was “Azad Kashmir Zindabad.” (Long live Azad Kashmir [a part of Kashmir administered by Pakistan])

Later, I asked her about responses to these protests by her family and in the college.

Two days after the protest, my father was called to the college by the principal. She told him that his daughter participates in street protests and chants slogans. My father responded by saying that during school hours, it’s not his responsibility to take care of my whereabouts. This irked the principal and the very next day, my father, an employee in the state government’s department of education was transferred to a new location, as a punishment for his daughter’s participation in protests. In the college campus, some faculty members openly took a position against the students. One of the professors failed me in my final exams, because of my involvement in the protests, but, another professor took my side and graded my exam fairly.

Shagufta Qayoom’s experiences provide an insight into a hidden history of young Kashmiri women’s political subjectivity, and modes of bodily resistance and political participation. While the burqa could not save young Qayoom from the wrath of the principal, Nighat Shafi (2017) in her memoir in a local daily recounts how the burqa saved her from the principal in the same college during the 1960s. While wearing the burqa, she took part in a students’ protest at M A Road (close to her college campus), which was tear-gassed, and students were assaulted by the police (Shafi 2017). Like Qayoom and Shafi,

many other young Kashmiri women continued to organise themselves through the 1960s and well into the 1970s.

A longer view of women's political mobilisations in Srinagar's Women's College resonates with coincidences and continuities that point to the flows of intergenerational social memory and political consciousness. In early November 1973, an event was to be held at Women's College at M A Road, to change the name of the college to "Nehru Memorial College," in honour of Jawahar Lal Nehru (Qayum 1989: 337). Sheikh Abdullah, a key political figure of the time, was to preside over the function. However, upon his arrival at the venue, Abdullah's entourage was attacked by the protesting students—both male as well as female—and was forced to retreat (ud-Din 2017). The protesting students chanted anti-Abdullah slogans, burnt his effigies, and smeared mud on his pictures (Qayum 1989: 337–38). Young women destroyed the signboard that had been fixed on the main building, and the remnants continued to be there until as recently as 2009 (ud-Din 2017).

Soon after, these protests spilled over from Srinagar to the other districts of Kashmir: Islamabad, Sopore, and Baramulla. In order to control the protesting students, the government closed all schools and colleges (Qayum 1989: 338). Similar scenes were witnessed on M A Road four decades later in April 2017, when protesting students, especially young women, were tear-gassed by the state forces. The "majedar tamasha" of 1973 and the "new phenomenon" of the spectacular female stone-pelter can, thus, be located not as exceptional figures, but as woven into the fabric of the popular resistance and the movement for self-determination across decades.

Given the long history and extant social memories of Kashmiri women's participation in the resistance movement, why have women's narratives of resistance been invisible?

### Gender, Nation, and Memory

The intense violence and militarisation of Kashmiri lives has often led to women playing unconventional or non-normative gender roles. For instance, women have long acted as "chaperones of men" in Kashmir to protect them from violent state intrusions while travelling; they have gone to courts, army camps, and police stations in search of their disappeared sons and husbands; and taken on men's roles in the household in their absence (Manecksha 2017; Zia 2017). They have also engaged, as we have seen above, in a range of "small" acts of political agency, both everyday and revolutionary (Zia 2017, 2016). What might then explain why narratives of resistance by women are largely framed either in biological terms of "motherhood" and "sisterhood," or as "victims or survivors" of violence and suffering?

Simona Sharoni (1995: 31) argues, "gender, like other such structures of social identity as culture, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality" affects the way we engage with "the social and political world." Gender, as an analytical lens, brings to light the "often taken-for-granted distinctions between what it means to be a man or a woman" and the power relations that are constitutive of these distinctions (Sharoni 1995: 31). These power relations shape the "dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena"

(Cockburn 1999: 3). Within nationalist and anti-colonial struggles, gender ideologies play out by ascribing different roles to men and women. However, the centrality of these ideologies to women's experiences and histories are neglected in the collective imaginations of nationhood (Cockburn 1999; Enloe 2014; Yuval-Davis 1997).

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989: 7) locate five major ways in which women are seen as participating in national processes, chief among them being "as biological reproducers" of nations, "as transmitters of its culture" and "as signifiers of national differences." These roles are constructed differently across historical contexts, according to the specific circumstances of these struggles. As biological reproducers, women are burdened with the task of producing boundaries for ethnic or imagined national communities, and an attack on their bodies is, thus, seen as harm to the nation.

In the sphere of cultural production, women become the embodiment of the cultural traditions they are supposed to pass on: the nation as a woman in danger or a "mother who lost her sons in battle" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989: 10). The nation is projected as the motherland, whose honour and dignity needs to be protected (Kaul 2018). This casts women as beings whose honour needs to be defended and protected as a national priority. In the context of resistance or nationalist struggles, women are thus pressurised to "articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse" (Kandiyoti 1991: 432). Yet, these ideological constructions also open up a space for both men and women to derive strength from community bonds and ways of belonging.

While all Kashmiri bodies have suffered brutal violence by the state, the infliction and effects of the violence are gendered as men and women are "tortured and abused in different ways" primarily because of the "different meanings culturally ascribed to the male and female body" (Cockburn 1999: 11; Robinson 2013). Conflict adversely affects women's lives, especially when the impunity for violence committed by state forces is so high, as in Kashmir (JKCCS 2015). Women's resistance to such violence is often expressed as the strength to survive after having experienced bodily harm.

During the student protests of April 2017, Zakir Musa, a commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen—a Kashmiri militant organisation—urged female students to refrain from participating in street protests as their "brothers are alive yet" (*Kashmir Reader* 2017). This appeal projects the protection of women's honour as Kashmiri "sisters" as a central matter of concern for the liberation struggle of Kashmir (Robinson 2013). A feminist analysis brings to our notice the ways in which gender relations intersect with the popular discourse on the struggle for self-determination. It also alerts us to the context-specific gender relations in a militarised society, which have constructed the Kashmiri women's bodies as sites of violence, victimhood, and suffering. The framing of women in familial terms as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation constructs the state's widespread and threatened violence against women as a matter of shared national and family honour.

Women have, across contexts of different political mobilisation, been active participants in "national, economic, political and

military struggles" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989: 7). Cynthia Enloe (2014: 87) argues that nationalism as an ideology provides space to women and "energizes them" to participate in nationalist movements. However, scholars opine that in this space for political participation, women have been treated as mere symbols by male nationalist leaders (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Enloe 2014). In other words, women hardly have had any negotiating powers in defining the terms of their inclusion in anti-colonial and nationalist projects (Sharoni 1995: 32). Popular representations of Kashmiri women conform to the tropes identified by feminist theorising: as the nation in pain, and sometimes the nation in an active act of rebellion and uprising. But, viewing women's participation as symbols or spectacles denies them the position of genuine participants in anti-colonial and nationalist struggles.

Young women's participation in the street protests of April 2017 involving acts such as stone-pelting—acts viewed as being generally undertaken by angry young men rebelling against state forces—were framed in terms of an extraordinary display of aggressive, non-normative resistance by women, or as transgression into a public, non-familial space constructed as masculine and out of bounds for women. In both these framings, women were viewed as the angry or agitated symbols of the nation, and became representational of a particular historical

moment and social reality as these images proliferated and were circulated on social media.

The protests of the 1960s and 1970s, which unfolded in a remarkably similar fashion, however, reveal older political histories and the political space that women have occupied in the struggle for self-determination. The interpretation of women's political acts as unique spectacles denies them the position of genuine political actors having their own creative and subversive engagements with the resistance movement. In doing so, it conforms to gendered power dynamics and ideologies of nationhood.

Kashmiri women have played various roles within the resistance movement over the last few decades. Yet, their participation both within and outside their defined gender roles and capacities is rendered invisible and apolitical in the collective memory and Kashmiri nationalist histories, especially when compared to those of men, whose contributions are remembered as those of heroes, martyrs, and brave sons of the nation. Women's protests from two different time periods reveal the ways in which women's political agency is both celebrated and yet denied at the same time. Paying attention to the hidden histories of women's political participation also allows us to see the ways in which discourses about imagined nationhood in Kashmir speak to men and women's experiences of resistance and survival differently.

# NOTE

- 1 Shagufta Qayoom is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the interviewee. I interviewed her in the month of October 2017, to get an insight into the Kashmiri students' movement of the 1960s.

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# Jinn, Floods, and Resistant Ecological Imaginaries in Kashmir

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How Kashmiri women experience and narrate questions of resource sovereignty and dispossession within the context of Kashmir's long-drawn-out military occupation, and India's investments in mega hydroelectric dams on Kashmir's rivers have been discussed. The devastating floods in 2014 led Kashmiris to increasingly challenge perceptions of nature or natural disasters as apolitical. Dams are an integral part of border-making processes, and gender, space, and borders are continually co-produced through militarised infrastructures. Women's resistant imaginaries, which combine political and ecological metaphors, and rely on conceptions of jinn and other non-human agency, offer a way to rethink Kashmir beyond its securitised geographies.

In a popular cartoon by the Kashmiri artist, Mir Suhail, the map of India is drenched in the golden hue of electricity, while Kashmir, hanging precariously on the map, is suffocated by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation's (NHPC) noose, turning it ominously dark (Suhail 2015).

The NHPC is India's premier hydropower generation corporation, which, Kashmiris assert, has been "stealing" Kashmiri resources to power the Indian economy for the past several decades (Bhan 2014). In April 2013, Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) National Conference (NC)-led state government asked New Delhi to pay Kashmir for its water resources and stop depriving Kashmiris of their most valuable resource and their prized economic asset (Parvaiz 2013). This was not the first time that Kashmiris had demanded ownership over their waterbodies, or recognised that the control of economic resources was key for India to maintain its political control over Kashmir (Hakeem 2014). In 2011, Taj Mohi-ud-din, a senior politician from the Congress party, had accused the NHPC of acting like an imperial power and thwarting local industry and entrepreneurship (Umar 2011). According to a Right to Information application filed in 2016, J&K was the "second largest buyer of electricity produced in its own territory" (Parvaiz 2016). Even as Kashmiris have frequently drawn meaningful connections between territorial and resource sovereignties, tropes of electricity theft, resource misuse, and hijacking of Kashmiri rivers gained even more traction after the floods of 2014, making questions of resource control and ownership critical components in the Kashmiri fight for *azaadi* (freedom) from the long-drawn out military occupation in Kashmir (Junaid 2013; Kaul 2013; Duschinski and Bhan 2017; Duschinski et al 2018; Suhail 2018).<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2012, I was in Gurez, the northernmost frontier tehsil in the Bandipora district, conducting the first segment of my ethnographic fieldwork on dam-related displacements in the villages of Badwan and Khopri.<sup>2</sup> By 2016, the villages were expected to be submerged by India's 330 megawatt (mw) dam on the Kishanganga river, a tributary of River Jhelum, which courses through Gurez, before it enters Pakistan, irrigating vast swathes of its prime agricultural land. Gurez, much like other border provinces in the state, got three hours of electricity daily through a diesel-powered generator, which was not connected to the northern grid that supplies electricity to nine Indian states, including India's capital city, Delhi. The irony was not lost on Gurezis, who saw their rivers being repurposed to power the Indian nation while

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their villages remained relegated to the “dark ages,” with no immediate government plans to electrify them. In addition to lamenting the loss of their rivers, with no tangible benefits in sight, Gurezis were also worried about losing access to critical resources such as sand, wood, glaciers, animals, and highland pastures, because the dam and its related infrastructure now populated the landscape. The situation was worse for Gurezi women who no longer felt “free” to pursue their livelihoods or venture into the forests in search of medicinal herbs, vegetables, and mushrooms. For them, the dam had not just “stolen” their resources, but also their freedom and ability to move freely in a space already scarred by years of military control.

### **Gender, Space and Borders**

In this paper, I discuss questions of resource sovereignty within the context of Kashmir’s prolonged military occupation, foregrounding how resource access and dispossessions are deeply gendered processes, and how the Kishanganga dam’s reconfiguration of space in Gurez imposed new immobilities on communities that were already hemmed in by the densely militarised line of control, which divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan (Rocheleau et al 1996; Moeckli and Braun 2001; Peluso and Watt 2001; Gururani 2002). In doing so, I show how gender, space, and borders were continually co-produced through militarised infrastructure, and how, far from being inert, the dam established new mechanisms of social and spatial control, further reinforcing stricter regulations on women’s movements and their abilities to seek independent livelihoods. I build on feminist interventions that outline the centrality of space to gendered subjectivities, a mutually co-constitutive relationship in which space is not a fixed or “independent dimension,” but relies on and is “constructed out of social relations” (Massey 1994: 2, 3; Gururani 2014). As power courses through built infrastructure, it reproduces militarised geographies of domination and resistance, as well as a continued renegotiation of the meanings and materialities of space, place, and gender (Low 2009). In the end I discuss how, in a context where the military occupies vast tracts of prime agricultural land, and meadows, forests, and grasslands, women’s narratives, especially after the 2014 floods, combined political and ecological metaphors to reimagine Kashmir’s war-torn and lifeless landscapes as vibrant and alive, and, in the process, offered a way to rethink Kashmir beyond its securitised geographies.

I first map out how the devastating flooding of River Jhelum in 2014 made questions of resource sovereignty central to questions of azaadi. As mentioned earlier, misgivings about the NHPC’s imperial control over Kashmir’s rivers were widespread even in the 1990s, with a few strident voices cautioning against the central government’s increasing control over hydropower projects as a means to erode Kashmir’s “capacity for self-reliance” (DN 1991: 1959; Hakeem 2014). But, until 2014, questions of resource control and access featured sparingly in public conversations about Kashmir’s economic future and its viability as an independent entity. The 2014 flood changed this

substantially. Several civil-society groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kashmir began asking if the Kishanganga river was another “disaster waiting to happen,” since the NHPC was diverting the waters from the Kishanganga river to the Wular Lake, raising its water level, and reducing its future capacity to soak surging waters from River Jhelum. Kashmiris increasingly situated “natural” disasters within their larger political fields, in order to extend Kashmiri resistance to environmental issues (and not just territorial ones) and, at the same time, dislocate perceptions of nature as apolitical. Dams were increasingly seen as critical instruments for maintaining the Indian state’s control over Kashmir’s water resources. They were, as Bonnemaïson and Macy (2003) claim, “statements” or “ideologies” in concrete, which revealed the intersections between gendered dislocations and India’s masculine infrastructure (which included both men and equipment) in the context of Kashmir’s military occupation.

In order to trace these connections, I turn to the floods of 2014, which played a critical part in alerting Kashmiris to the ways in which resource disenfranchisement and “natural disasters” were deeply political events, with consequences for how they transformed the logistics and experiences of occupation and resistance in Kashmir.

### **A Fight for Identity**

Long seen as a source of life and livelihood in Kashmir and its “cultural symbol,” the Jhelum, into which the Kishanganga merges, is both seen as a witness to the ongoing brutality suffered by Kashmiris, and also its direct victim (Ahmad 2012: 66). For instance, a famous Sufi rock song, entitled “Jehlumas” by the band Alif, which became popular in the post-flood years, foregrounds the loss of love and certainty, pangs of terror and solitude, and the horrors of violence that the Jhelum has witnessed and documented through time. A refrain from the song goes thus: “Is anyone listening? Who can I tell? My river is on fire! And I fear I shall slip into its waters.” Despite being burdened with decades of despair—much like the men and women of Kashmir who have lost their dear ones, their kith and kin, to military camps, extrajudicial killings, detention facilities, and unknown mass graves—the crossing of the river carries the message of a hopeful reunion (Chatterji et al 2009). Kashmiri poets have often relied on using Jhelum as a “symbol of motion and change,” deriving from it “profounder lessons of life like consciousness and continuity of Kashmiri identity” (Ahmad 2012: 92, 93). In the aftermath of the massive floods of 2014 thus, the Jhelum became a metaphor for the resilience of Kashmiris as they drew strength from its defiant flow while also fearing its fury.

The floods of 2014 that killed at least 557 people and submerged 2,600 villages across many districts in J&K was one of the worst floods to hit the state in over 100 years (Pandey 2014). It was the result of torrential rains, unchecked urbanisation, mismanaged floodplains, and, Kashmir’s extensive and prolonged militarisation (Kanth and Ghosh 2015b). In a human rights report released by the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society in April 2015, Kanth and Ghosh (2015a: 43) write that “while poor regulation and bad planning certainly had a role

in this destructive pattern of growth, what is rendered invisible in this map of land use is the pervasive military occupation of the city's hill sides and the Karewas," and its waterbodies, glaciers, and forests. At the same time, the Jhelum did not just carry copious amounts of silt and mud but also the tortured and mutilated bodies of Kashmiris (Mathur 2016: 61). A witness to the past three decades in which the Indian military has used brutal counter-insurgency tactics to squash widespread dissent, a flooded Jhelum was a grim reminder of the accumulated violence on Kashmir's body politic that had not spared the Jhelum either. Amidst Kashmir's violent turmoil, the complete mismanagement of the river by a series of puppet governments had wreaked environmental havoc. Layers and mounds of silt and mud, and massive constructions on critical wetlands in and around the river or on its critical tributaries had suffocated the river. The government, Kashmiris claimed, had purposefully choked the river. The fight for Kashmir's rivers, particularly for River Jhelum, considered to be Kashmir's lifeline, was a fight for Kashmir's identity (*vajud*). In the years following the flood, questions about Kashmir's rivers and their centrality for Kashmir's azaadi assumed centre stage. Kashmiris demanded that River Jhelum be properly dredged. They challenged the state of Kashmir's rivers and their ecological vulnerabilities in the context of intense militarisation of their land and rivers and the commodification of their water resources.

The flood of 2014 was, thus, a turning point in many ways, both in terms of how civil society groups envisioned the relationship between environmental and territorial sovereignty, and how Kashmir's struggle for azaadi became tied, even if loosely, to the reclamation of its rivers and waterbodies. Even before the flood, Kashmiris had repeatedly argued that the numerous hydroelectric dams in the region had contributed to the inundation of Kashmir's most fertile rice-growing regions. Kashmir's agricultural sector, they claimed, was deliberately being weakened so that regional food sovereignty could be undermined and Kashmir could once again be turned into a spectacle for tourism. Indeed, in a prescient commentary, only several months before the devastating flood, a senior engineer said to me while sitting on the banks of River Jhelum:

We can clearly see the distinction between land and water right now. But if and when the flood comes, this whole area will be submerged. Now if you build a barrage to contain water, you are creating a flood artificially, which will obviously submerge the areas it spans.<sup>3</sup>

The unstable distinctions between land and water, especially in Kashmir that owes its origins to a "lake" (Paray 2016), were obvious to people who view dams as "artificial floods" rather than as facilitators of development and self-sufficiency. Indeed, for many Kashmiris, the "artificial flooding" of their land caused by massive hydroelectric projects on the Jhelum, Chenab and their tributaries, was a purposeful move to ensure Kashmir's continued reliance on India. According to the Chairman of the Kashmir Economic Alliance, a consortium of various traders' bodies,

The Government of India does not allow us to grow on any front, economically. Be it power, tourism, or any other sector of the economy. If we need a rupee to survive, they will only give us 75 paisas. There

were times when we relied on our milk, eggs, and chicken. Everything that India does here is a conspiracy against Kashmiris. Why shouldn't I think like that? We were a haven for small industries. And, now we don't produce anything. Our water sources have been colonised and exploited.

### Politicising the Flood

After the floods, the Indian news and government agencies worked even harder to present Kashmiris as objects of Indian largesse. The mainstream news channels celebrated the Indian military's benevolence during the floods even as Kashmiris were left stranded in their flooded homes with little to no help from the military (Kanth and Ghosh 2015b). Indeed, as a Kashmiri reporter remarked at the time, "everything is political in Kashmir. Even a flood" (Mubarki 2014). In the post-flood narratives that I collected from several Kashmiri men and women, it was clear that the floods of 2014 had collapsed familiar ethical, moral, and ecological worlds, while laying bare the relationship between politics and ecology.

In the next section, I present stories from my interviews with women from Srinagar, a year after the flood had destroyed their homes and added yet another layer of fear and anxiety to their already precarious lives. By no means were these stories limited to women, nor do I claim to offer a gendered perspective that is divorced from differences of class and location. Despite these differences, my conversations with women across Kashmir foregrounded the gendered nature of Kashmir's military occupation and the state's masculine infrastructure that has occupied its roads, alleyways, mountains, lakes, and buildings. India's military interventions in Kashmir have for the most part included defence installations such as roads, bridges, railway lines, and more quotidian forms of control and surveillance in the form of bunkers and checkpoints, which have implications for how men and women can go about their everyday routines or access certain spaces and places. Stringent forms of militarised control are also routinely imposed through legal provisions, such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFPSA) and Public Safety Act (PSA), that grant the Indian military impunity against war crimes in Kashmir, which include enforced disappearances, extra juridical killings, rape, sexual violence, and torture (Duschinski and Hoffman 2011; Mathur 2012).

In a geography heavily structured by the logics of militarism, the flood, too, according to many Kashmiris, was an extension of a military state, a silent instrument of death and destruction that had weaponised nature. Kashmiris remained deeply wary of India's selective rescue missions and its rejection of international humanitarian help under the pretext that India was sufficiently equipped to rescue its citizens. Within this context, Kashmiri women volunteers came out on the flooded streets and alleyways, along with their male counterparts, to rescue their neighbours and take on the task of saving, rehabilitating, and rebuilding community in the post-flood period (Reshi 2014). Contrary to mainstream portrayals of Kashmiri women as victims, recent scholarship has documented their active role in the politics of Kashmiri resistance (Kaul 2013; Malik 2015; Ghosh 2016; Zia 2017). Kashmiri women have resisted the military

occupation in Kashmir as mothers and wives whose sons or husbands were killed or disappeared in the three-decade long brutal counter-insurgency war (Zia 2016). As human rights lawyers, activists, photographers, film-makers, and reporters, they have tirelessly documented military crimes, and fought to reopen cases of rape and sexual torture against the Indian military (Batoool et al 2016; Manecksha 2017). In certain instances, Kashmiri women have also assumed explicit political roles to demand the right of self-determination (Malik 2015). In their post-flood narratives, too, women offered a trenchant political commentary to establish the predatory nature of the Indian state in Kashmir and its intensification under India's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

### 'The Water Was a *Balai*, a Demon'

The women I spoke with shared their sense of disquiet and horror by focusing on the "nature" of the water that had snaked into their houses on the evening of 5 September 2014, leaving behind mounds of mud and rubble. According to Nusrat, a middle-aged woman from Bemina, "that was not water, *ye ais balai* (it was a demon, a curse). The water corroded our fingers. We had to take tetanus shots to get rid of the corruptions." I had spent many days and nights in Nusrat's living room, which was bedecked with bright red sofas and cushions and Nusrat's carefully curated set of family pictures before the floods took it all away. Tearfully, she pointed to the walls that were still damp, even after eight months, with the paint on them peeling off to reveal the damage the floodwaters had caused. She had cleaned "the walls with phenyl several times but the grime refused to leave. This was not water. It was a strange mix of urine, faeces, and dead fish." And, scariest of all was that the "water was screaming, it was lamenting." Nusrat was sitting with her daughter in a room, which was on the second floor of her house when she had heard a sound, which she mistakenly assumed to be from her husband's activities downstairs. It turned out that the water had already entered her house before she had realised it. Nusrat's mother chimed in to say that "people were running away from water but it followed them."

The other stories I had heard from women spoke of the floods being "directed" by a group of non-Kashmiri men, who were either seen on horses, or on buildings wearing long white robes. For Sameena, a middle-aged woman from Safakadal, in the heart of Srinagar city, the water was strange. "During nights, the water would scream so much; it felt as if we were being attacked by demonic forces, *kos tyam balai aai hamlas*." In their stories, which seamlessly combined spiritual and political metaphors, women spoke of their *pirs* (spiritual mentors) who had warned them of the calamitous futures that awaited Kashmiris once Narendra Modi was elected to power:

I know a very pious soul, who had seen visions of Modi directing water and crushing people and property, and throwing them helter-skelter on the sidewalks and pavements. And this is exactly how it felt when the deluge finally came.

Sakina, another middle-aged woman who was visiting from a village in northern Kashmir, chimed in, "Mona ji, you won't believe it when I say this. But I saw how a giant man, whose

arms must have been at least a kilometre long, was directing the flow of water in my village."

For Nusrat, Sakina, and Sameen, thus, the flood was an orchestrated design by outsiders (read Indians) to drown Kashmiris in their own water. Indeed, in the aftermath of the flood, a journalist described the flood as a "genocide in the skin of a natural calamity" (Sheikh 2014). As I argued earlier, such perceptions emerged within the context of Indian government's unwillingness to accept international aid for Kashmir, and its exaggerated and strategic emphasis on military benevolence in post-flood rescue and rehabilitation efforts. Kashmiris believed that water was the most benign weapon in India's counter-insurgency kit, especially as most "mainstream Indians," particularly the Hindutva right-wing groups, refused to see the flood as an outcome of extensive militarisation. Instead, as Ashraf (2014) describes it, they called the flood a "comeuppance for the Kashmiri disloyalty to India, a divine chastisement for their quest for freedom and allegiance to Pakistan."

The post-flood stories were poignant testimonials of a jolted world in which women's relationship with land and water had been profoundly altered, and in which women used their water-soaked walls and damaged material artefacts as repositories of a familial world that had now turned eerie and unfamiliar. Women's stories of Srinagar city populated with men on horses, or with water that "shrieked and yelled" stayed with me, shaping how I heard women's anxious tales of an imminent flood that the Kishanganga dam would unleash, submerging their villages and devouring their highly fertile land. Likewise, women's stories from another border region in Uri, where the consequences of the 2014 flood had worsened because of NHPC's hydroelectric dam on River Jhelum (commissioned more than a decade ago in the 1990s) established the long-term social and ecological consequences of mega-dams. Such stories also offered radical ecological imaginaries in which Kashmir was no longer barricaded with dams and military installations, but presented as vibrant and free, empowered by extraordinary forces that animated its land, forests, and rivers. These narratives confronted the "ecological dread and disenchantment" produced through years of violence and militarised confinement (Palmer 2017: 2). In the next two sections, I rely on ethnographic narratives from Kashmir's border regions—Gurez, where the Kishanganga dam is currently in its final stages of completion, and Uri, situated on the banks of River Jhelum, where a 480 mw dam was commissioned in the 1990s—to analyse how mega-dams shape women's anxieties about flooding, resource alienation, and social and economic freedom.

### The Kishanganga Dam

In Gurez, which is roughly 50 miles from Srinagar city, people were spared the wrath of a flooded Jhelum. Instead, Gurezis dreaded the man-made flood that would forever alter their worlds. The Kishanganga had flooded many times in the past, devouring large tracts of land or slicing it into fragments. People's accumulated wisdom had taught them to work with the ebb and flow of the Kishanganga river. But, nothing could prepare



them for the deluge that awaited them (Baruah 2012). Gurezis would often say “that the dam was their *sehlab* [flood],” which would drown their villages, and leave them at the mercy of government-sponsored rehabilitation packages. Gurezi women experienced a deeper sense of dislocation since they felt terribly disenfranchised in an already altered landscape, disrupted by men and materials that were both seen as “foreign” entities. Since 2009, Gurez was populated with officials of the Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) and the NHPC, most of whom belonged to the plains of India. In addition to setting up make-shift camps and settlements on land that once belonged to the villagers, the HCC and the NHPC had also set up a stone-crushing plant in Badwan village. The incessant sounds from the crushing of rocks and the air they breathed, which contained specks of dust and smoke, I was told, felt “foreign.” The outsiders, all of them men, dug the earth, crushed rocks, and bored their mountains to redirect their water to produce electricity in far-away places. Instead of horses, it was men who were doing it; and instead of using sticks and batons, there was heavy machinery and equipment that was stealing their water. Women worried about the deluge that would submerge their homes, land, trees, and orchards, and drew a close connection between the impending flood and the loss of their freedom and independence.

In the summer of 2015, as the date for the commissioning of the dam drew closer, Gurezis experienced increased fear and uncertainty, which sometimes turned into anger and bitterness within the community. No longer would I find women gathered outside their homes, soaking in the summer sun or taking intermittent breaks between household chores and working on their land. Many homes were already deserted and families were scattered between Gurez, Srinagar, and Bandipora. Men and women were engaged in heated discussions, most of them tied to the issue of insufficient compensation for their acquired land. Despite this uncertainty, women refused to abandon their land even though there were government sanctions against cultivation that year. “Women love the land more than men do,” Nafeesa told me as she loosened the earth with her hands, flattening it a few seconds later after she had removed the weeds. “We work on it more than men do, and it takes care of us and our families.” A few other women who were working alongside Nafeesa spoke about their uncertain futures, a routine conversation among women when they gathered together in their homes or fields to socialise or to share updates regarding matters of land acquisition and compensation. “When the HCC came, and offered money, our important leaders did not ask the right questions. They accepted the money thinking that the world was coming to them.” I asked them if they had resented this decision, to which they promptly replied, “We were told that the dam was not women’s matter and the men were enough to tackle this issue.” Given their active participation in political rallies and speeches, the absence of women’s voices in dam-related matters, at least in the early years, was a striking one. The women I spoke with attributed this to the “misconception most men carried regarding what the dam might bring in terms of

money and other benefits.” But, a lot of these turned out to be illusory as people realised that “they were not just losing their land, water, trees, fruit, and vegetables,” but also an “entire way of life.” Now, people are *hushaar* (vigilant), especially women, who feel terribly anxious about raising their children in unfamiliar environments, without access to farmland or the forests. “What will we do without this air, this water, and this land?” chimed in Haseena, a young woman in her 30s. She went on to say,

If we have 50 *kanals* here, we can only buy a few *kanals* in Srinagar from the compensation money. And the patch of land will mostly be used for building a house, with high walls and a solid gate. Those houses will confine us to the four walls. We will have to fight for inches of land for our graves [*marguzar*]. Here, we are free to move. There is so much space. We can go to the forest to get wood, herbs, and *zeera*. We will miss our forest trips where we would sing, chat, and play.

### Conceptions of Freedom

The theme of “openness” of the fields, forest, and their homes, unencumbered by concrete walls and iron gates, was recurrent in women’s stories of dispossession. Older women recounted spending hours, sometimes from 9.00 am until 2.00 pm, in the forests, gathering wood, grass, fruit, and herbs. For many younger women, who went to the forest for picnics and not always for work, the openness of their orchard in Badwan offered occasional and welcome refuge from the confines of domestic life. Haunted by the uncertainties of the future, however, the present was punctuated with fear and remorse. The thought of abandoning their land, their *watan* (homeland) and “mother,” made them tearful as they asserted how the openness of their lands and forests meant that they were “free” too (Maggi 2001). Women’s freedom was their ability to do *chakraat* (walks or picnics) to roam in their fields and in their highland pastures, a freedom they would lose in the city. This freedom was place-based and, therefore, also precarious. It was structured by local regulations and cultural codes, most of which would shift once people moved into towns or cities, leaving women vulnerable to new and unfamiliar modes of order and propriety. “Living their lives with 10 *marlas*” (one 160th of an acre), thus made them terribly anxious, as they saw it as an assault on their right to freedom and mobility.

Scholars have shown how displacement intensifies relations of power instead of reconstituting hierarchical relationships between men and women. As displaced communities struggle with the loss of their homes and identities, such social crises can potentially translate into stricter regulations for women considered to be repositories of community honour and integrity (Srinivasan 2012). For Gurezi women, thus, the cultural and linguistic unfamiliarity of neighbouring towns and villages (given that many older women spoke Shina and not Kashmiri), filled them with uncertainties about their ability to sustain their social freedoms in other places.

And, this freedom was as social as it was economic. Women cringed at the thought of having to buy *rajma* (beans) or potatoes, part of their staple diet, and crops that Gurezis deem to be the “best and sweetest in the entire state,” from the market.

"Here, we grow these ourselves, care for them. It is our wish if we want to eat or sell them, but in the towns we will have to buy these from the bazaar." Most women recognised that contrary to what the government officials were promising, a forced migration into the cities and towns would not automatically translate into "opportunities for upward mobility," especially for women who would not enjoy the bodily freedom or forms of economic self-sufficiency that living close to a river or a forest afforded.

### Dams as Military Apparatus

Gurezi women's care and labour translated into "love" for a vibrant landscape, which was now drenched in unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells. The muck and the concrete had diverted the water and contaminated their routes of travel. In addition to the concertina wires installed by the military—a ubiquitous presence in Gurez—there were now meshes and slabs of iron, rusted trucks and rotting jeeps in the vicinity of their apple orchards, and mountains reduced to rubble and dust. If anything, the dam was an assertion of masculinity and control over a vibrant landscape. Much like Nehru's writings in which the Himalayas figured predominantly in gendered narratives of self-realisation and nation-building, for the engineers and geologists of the HCC, too, dam building was deeply connected with conceptions of heroic masculinity in the face of difficult weather and harsh mountainscapes (Holden 2003). The "cool rationality of modernity" that the Himalayas represented for Nehru was only enhanced by the HCC's investments in "meticulous planning, precise execution" and cutting-edge technology that helped the engineers and geologists establish domination over mountain valleys (Holden 2003: 7; HCC 2014).<sup>4</sup> Scores of men donning their yellow helmets and fluorescent safety jackets, many of them from outside Gurez, considered themselves to be "pioneers" who were building India's prestige project in an inhospitable terrain, where it was often difficult to breathe, especially if they were trapped inside the long and cavernous water tunnels. And, yet, the work of engineering persisted despite the hardships. Embedded in the tropes of hardship and difficulty were celebrations of their hardiness, the enormity of their efforts, and proofs of "national greatness," which lay in transforming nature and bringing it in line with visions of national destiny.

The masculine nature of infrastructural work and the walls, tunnels, adits, and concrete in Gurez produced a new set of gendered immobilities, forcing women to alter their movements and restructure their sense of space and place.<sup>5</sup> In frontier zones of Kashmir, where movements are heavily surveilled by the Indian military, infrastructural interventions such as big dams also end up multiplying and extending borders that limit people's, especially women's, access to critical spaces and resources. In doing so, infrastructural forms shape social domains by imposing new geographies of movements and restrictions, and violating pre-existing rights and claims to particular spaces. And, in the process, what arise are borders within borders, and infrastructure that reproduces

the logics of border surveillance and enforcement (Weizman 2007; Lambert 2013).

Dams, thus, become extensions of a military–security apparatus, widening their reach into new social and ecological domains, and intensifying everyday levels of policing and surveilling, while ensuring that even less physical space remains for public use. For instance, concertina wires are no longer only confined to military installations, but are also used to enclose dam sites; there is posted signage in non-military sites prohibiting the use of cameras; there are no-entry signs, placed strategically near the dam site so civilians cannot access walled-off zones. Likewise, power stations built underground remain inaccessible to the general population, and worker camps installed on prime agricultural land make it difficult for women to walk across their fields after sunset.

### The Uri Dam

In the frontier tehsil of Uri in north Kashmir, where the construction of the 480 MW Uri-I project, coincided with the onset of Kashmir's armed rebellion for *azaadi*, dams were not mere material extensions of a military–security apparatus. In a bid to grab land, several people were "disappeared" by the military in the 1990s, often, as many villagers recount, at the behest of the NHPC. For instance, Razia, a 40-year old woman and a community leader, recounts the horrid tale when her father, a landlord, was disappeared in 1990 when she was 16 years old (Bhan and Bukhari 2017). She claims that her father, who the family was unable to find despite their best efforts, was reluctant to sell land to the NHPC and was, therefore, seen as an impediment to the upcoming hydroelectric project. Hardly anyone at the time could speak against the project, recalls another villager, "because the military could silence us anytime."

For Razia and other villagers, thus, the dam was a disciplinary tactic to reorder spaces, communities, and ecologies, divide land, and force a recalcitrant population into submitting to the new demands of corporate and military labour (Bhan 2014). At the same time, the dam dispossessed populations of their land and resources, a phenomenon they saw repeating itself during the 2014 floods, when Uri suffered massive destruction because of a flooded Jhelum. The villagers complained that the NHPC, instead of disposing the debris from the dam in environmentally-safe places in the 1990s, had dumped it haphazardly in the village in the form of huge mounds that had loosened due to the flood and damaged their homes and fields (Bhan and Bukhari 2017). The water had eroded the debris, which consisted of boulders, mud, and pebbles, and dumped it on people's agricultural land. The dam, it was clear, had lasting ecological consequences for Uri, which the 2014 flood had both intensified and made visible. The intervening two decades could barely hide the irreversible impact of the dam and its debris on their land, rivers, and waterbodies. The situation in Uri, thus, corroborated Gurezis' fears that the Kishanganga dam would eventually flood more areas than the NHPC had estimated and would trigger lasting ecological impacts in the area, such as modified temperatures,

stunted vegetation, more cloud cover, and less sunshine (Bauer and Bhan 2016, 2018).

### The Flood and Its Jinn

For many women like Razia, the flood, while catastrophic, opened up alternative ecological imaginaries in which the gushing waters of the Jhelum river made explicit the connections between land and water, and human and non-human forms, reminding them of the lived landscape that existed before it was burdened with concrete and concertina wires. Here, I describe how Razia, a community leader and the daughter of the disappeared landlord, sutures a fragmented landscape through tales she recounts of the flood and her encounters with non-human figures, who remind her of Kashmir's *garam* (spiritually potent landscape), and the ways it has been mauled and desecrated by decades of violence.

The waters came from a *sar* [source], which gives birth to seven rivers. Out of those seven rivers, four flow into Kashmir and three into Pakistan. The four rivers were responsible for the flooding in Kashmir while the three rivers were responsible for the flooding in Pakistan. Humans were not the only ones affected. There were jinn too and it is their shrieks that we all heard. They, too, lamented the destruction of their homes. The floodwater was so furious that it sliced the village into three parts. People had not yet set up makeshift bridges, which limited people's movements, and yet there was a person, I was told, who would move across banks with immense ease. Sometimes villagers saw him on this side of the river, sometimes on the other side. I decided to find this person and set out into the village, the third day after the flood, after the rains had stopped. After walking a mile or two, I arrived at a spot where a villager had sacrificed a cow to stop the flooded river. It was here that this "man" came to me. I asked him the reason and purpose of his visit. He wanted to see the level of destruction in our village since the flood waters had destroyed his world as well. He said he had come from a border village, which was located on the banks of the *sar* and was about 25 kilometres away.

After recounting her encounter with the jinn, Razia talked in detail about her relationship with the *sar*, a place she had visited often. As a community leader in her village and also the daughter of the local landlord, Razia visited many sites that once fell under her father's sphere of influence. Indeed, her interactions with the jinn and his directives to her must be understood within the context of the important position she occupied in the village as a well-known social and political worker.<sup>6</sup>

The first time I went to the *sar* was after a few Bakarwals [pastoralists] who live in *dhoks* [small mountain houses] complained about the military's continued harassment. Despite living in a tightly-surveilled territory in the higher reaches of the Himalayas, Bakarwal *dhoks* were raided often, sometimes in the middle of the night. Men were routinely asked to leave the *dhoks* and sit outside during cold nights while women were instructed to stay back. I took my mother along and a few other villagers to visit the site to figure out a way to help the community. I mobilised at least 25–30 Bakarwals and went to the camp commander. I told him you have such high surveillance during the day so why is it that people are harassed in the night time; their identity cards and other official documents demanded at arbitrary hours? Seeing the size of the crowd, the commander ensured us that he would look into the matter. The Bakarwals lived in peace for some time after that. After we left the military station, we went to the *sar* with Bakarwals and their horses, many of them used for military portering. When we arrived, a feast was ready for us. A Bakarwal family had cooked a meal

for us and sacrificed a goat for the feast. I can never forget the picturesque *sar*, with its blue waters dancing under gleaming sun rays. We could hear faint music coming from the other end of the *sar*. As I trained my ears, an older Bakarwal told me that the *sar* is home to jinn too, and these are old and pious jinn. The *sar* is deep and according to legend contains a mosque. He used to visit the *sar* with his grandfather and once a *barāg*—a winged steed used by the prophets to travel—appeared from under the water. The *barāg* instructed his grandfather to visit the site one more time but his grandfather pleaded that he was too old and might not be able to visit again. But the *barāg* insisted that he visit one more time, and carry with him a bag of rice. As instructed, the grandfather visited the *sar* and was told to dump all the rice in the *sar*. Later, he was asked to visit *Chasmashahi* and see the rice sprout there.

Razia continued to reflect on the "mysterious" and "magical" powers of the *sar*. "The *sar* is not always visible," she said. Even when the weather is clear, the *sar* refused to be seen often. There is too much *gunah* (sin) in Kashmir, but many land and waterbodies remain pious.

Razia's narrative is filled with references to a particular *sar* she is deeply fond of, one located in the highest reaches of Gulmarg, 25 kilometres (km) from her village. She attributes the floodwaters to the *sar*, which she calls a magical place, one that reveals itself to a few people. Indeed, the shepherd she meets on one of her trips there confirms this too. The weather turns in a second, he claims, making it difficult for people to spot the *sar*. There are places in Kashmir that resist being "revealed." Kashmir, Razia says, has many "secrets," with land and water-scapes that dance and sing, bless and curse, and those that disrupt or exceed the confines of the human imagination. Rivers and *sars* also know no boundaries; they traverse the militarised borders between India and Pakistan, causing flooding in Kashmir as well as in Pakistan, and, in doing so, they resist reductive representations of Kashmir as India's volatile frontier.

The rice grains that the Bakarwal's grandfather immersed in the *sar* sprouted far way in another waterbody, in Chasmashahi, located at least 60 km from Gulmarg, establishing the connectedness of a landscape that has been cut, sliced, split, mined, and fragmented—through walls, borders, dams, roads, landmines, and checkpoints—and rendered lifeless and inanimate. Such connections extend from the human to the non-human world, which include the jinn, who, dislocated by the floods, visited Razia's village to assess the damage. In her narratives, the jinn, disguised as a human, comes from the same *sar*, making it obvious to Razia that he was indeed a jinn since he possessed non-human capabilities to travel across flooded roads and bridges.

The jinn, bestowed in Islamic cosmology with a long life and the faculties to move fast and swiftly, while continually able to change form (Khan 2006: 238), says to Razia that the deluge is a *kheher from khuda* (wrath from god) and it will come again, but that she should try to stop it. Razia claims she is powerless in the face of such calamities, although the conversation inspires her to immediately begin post-flood recovery work in her village. Razia's constant invocations of the space as already heavily surveilled and guarded by the military, and their litany of atrocities against the Bakarwals, particularly their women and children, foregrounds a morally corrupt geography of militarism, in which the *sar*, standing here both as a metonym for

Kashmir and its sacredness, is contaminated with gunah. And, yet, despite being scarred with militarised violence and located amidst dense geographies of surveillance, the sar, which guards a sacred mosque and is also home to the jinn, dances with joy as fountains of water burst from its womb. In her post-flood recounting of Kashmir's morally laden geographies, in which jinn and humans are both victims of the deluge, Razia's story restores lost connections, human and non-human, natural and social, as well as spiritual and political.

In his extensive study of jinn in Delhi, Anand Taneja (2017: 10) argues that "jinns are linked to deep time, connecting human figures thousands of years apart." In doing so, they serve as "magical figures of memory," who, by virtue of the long lives they lead "[connect] human beings centuries and millennia apart in time" (Taneja 2017: 11, 25), while also challenging an amnesiac state's concerted attempts to efface Muslim artefacts and sacred sites in post-partition India. For Razia, too, the jinn reminded her of garam, spiritually potent spaces, or of the connectedness of spaces and waterbodies that militarised infrastructure—bunkers, camps, dams, and checkpoints—had fragmented. Such connections represented alternative social and material histories and spatial imaginaries that now lay buried under dense layers of a military occupation. In doing so, the jinn restore some form of mystique to Kashmir's land and water forms, for instance, through their abilities to not "reveal" themselves fully, despite the structures of surveillance that attempt to map every inch of the region's surface. At the same time, the jinn stand witness to the connections of the past; they speak to different modes of being and belonging in a space, where both are structured by the spatial logics of a military occupation. The jinn also prod Razia to "do something" and "stop the flood." Realising her charge, she assumes the task of rebuilding her community by setting up teams and equipment to clear her muck-damaged agricultural fields, and she reclaims what is left of her land and village.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have analysed how the intersections between dams and more quotidian forms of militarised infrastructure shape women's anxieties about their environments, and their abilities to seek opportunities for social, political, and economic freedoms. As exercises in border enforcement, the dams in Gurez and Uri intensified the structure and logics of a military state, by imposing new limitations on women's freedom of movement and by literally disappearing people who refused to conform to the NHPC's brutal land-grab policies. In a space where the military exercises various degrees and forms of spatial control, the flood of 2014 was both a stark reminder of how environmental and territorial freedoms were interlinked, and how Kashmir's river resources were being exploited to power the Indian economy, thus triggering a series of conversations on Kashmir's resource sovereignty and the fate of its rivers and waterbodies. The flood, it was clear, was a political event, which laid bare the state government's apathy and callousness toward Kashmir's water resources. For Gurezis, who had not experienced the 2014 flood, it stood as a reminder of what was to come: the dam, often called the sehlhab, would inundate their villages, and also their way of life, and the consequences of this disenfranchisement were deeply gendered. In women's narratives across Srinagar, Uri, and Gurez, I heard a trenchant critique of a militarised state, which was abusing Kashmir's resources and using them against the local populations, revealing women's vulnerabilities, but also spurring resistant political and ecological imaginaries in which Kashmir's land and waterscapes were reimagined and re-spatialised through allusions to jinn, spirits, and Kashmir's mystical and enchanted geographies. Such alternative conceptions of Kashmir's geography, which presented it as unfragmented, undivided, and garam (spiritually potent) exceeded the militarised logics of border enforcement, and can be read as the political renditions of a landscape scarred by decades of violence and bloodshed.

## NOTES

- 1 The term "occupation" encompasses both the affective and legal dimensions of the existing Indian state in Kashmir. Kashmiris overwhelmingly resent and resist the presence of a hostile, largely Hindu, military force and their violent tactics to suppress popular demands for self-determination. Indian military presence can justifiably be called an occupation based on Article 42 of The Hague Convention, which states the presence of a "hostile" army and the exercise of its authority over the local population as a fundamental characteristic of an occupation (Ferraro 2012: 7). The ICRC report notes that, in recent years, the meanings of occupation and the laws governing occupation have undergone many shifts, mainly because "in addition to the persistence of traditional forms of occupation," extraterritorial military interventions "have given rise to new forms of foreign military presence on the territory of a state, sometimes consensual but very often imposed" (Ferraro 2012: 7; Bhan and Misri 2015).
- 2 Badwan and Khopri are two villages in the Gurez tehsil, which is approximately 85 km from Bandipora district. According to census

data from 2011, there are around 479 families in Badwan-Wanpora and the total population is 3,327. Khopri-Mastan, a village considered to be the 7th least populous in Gurez has 97 households and a total population of 520 (GoI 2011). Despite these official statistics, the data on the total number of households in each village was contested by the villagers who felt that their *chula* or household was not represented in the data, which made them ineligible for dam-related compensation. Badwan, which means big forest, I was told was the "face of Gurez" since many of its residents have excelled in the bureaucracy, as well as in medicine, arts, and poetry. The villages once used to be at the heart of the Central Asian Silk route and memories abound from the times when Gurez was not a border, but an entrepôt, and a thriving cultural and trade centre. Likewise, villagers were also arbitrarily separated from their families and relatives in 1948, when the UN brokered the ceasefire line soon after India and Pakistan's first war over Kashmir.

- 3 Interview conducted by author, 5 June 2014.
- 4 HCC is the acronym for Hindustan Construction Company, a Mumbai-based contracting company, responsible for building the Kishanganga

dam. For more details, see HCC (2014). Also see Bhan (2014).

- 5 Unlike in other Himalayan regions, where women are an integral part of the workforce in mega-infrastructure projects, such as roads and dams, women in Gurez did not participate in similar forms of construction work.
- 6 By no means were jinn-related stories limited to women. In Gurez, for instance, both men and women spoke about them, worrying that the jinn were harder to spot now because human interventions had wreaked pre-existing moral and spiritual worlds. In writing about the world of jinn, some scholars express concern that a widespread belief in jinn among South Asian Muslim communities might be used to reinforce stereotypes about Muslim irrationality (in this case Muslim women's irrationality; see Naveeda Khan 2006: 239). Such stereotypes, they caution us, can miss out on the secular character of jinn, or their significance among non-Muslim communities in South Asia and beyond. In many instances, such as in the Feroz Shah Kotla ruins of Delhi, as Anand Vivek Taneja notes, non-Muslims, too, visit the *durgah*, petitioning the jinns to resolve their personal and professional

predicaments. Furthermore, such stereotypes erase how Jinn are dynamic entities, and the ways in which relationship between jinn and humanity is also constantly evolving. Jinn can be seen as political figures, offering a nostalgic view of the past, and a yearning and potential for inclusive and moral futures (Taneja 2017).

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# Home as the Frontier

## Gendered Constructs of Militarised Violence in Kashmir

SAMREEN MUSHTAQ

In conflict zones, the home–outside binary is often erased in practice as violence enters people's lives and personal spaces, diluting any distinction between combatants and non-combatants, even as the international humanitarian law and Geneva Conventions highlight the distinction. In Kashmir, a popular armed rebellion against the state, since 1989, has been met with brutal force. Making use of militarised masculinity to inflict violence on bodies and psyches of the people considered to be the “other” has been a norm. In extending the understanding of the front line from the border to homes, actions, bodies, and the everyday trauma that women face, the victimhood narrative is problematised by placing women as frontliners as they witness, survive, and resist.

The recognition of violence is no longer restricted to the interstate conflicts characterised by war, but extends to its prevalence in what is the changing “landscape of combat” (Cock 1989). Despite the international humanitarian law drawing out a distinction between combatants and civilians, the former being direct participants in hostilities and getting certain privileges as prisoners of war, and the latter not being made objects of any attack under the military operations (Watkin 2003), the lines have largely been blurred as these neat categorisations do not stand in the face of modern armed conflicts, where both the public and the private spaces are militarised and violence does not remain confined to the combat front, but enters people's safe havens.

This paper highlights how the home–outside binary is rendered indistinct in conflict, as homes become frontiers where people's lives and spaces are subjected to militarised control that makes gendered constructs of identity especially prominent. The paper builds on the existing research that brings to the fore the linkages between gendered identity and violence in the context of armed conflicts, using the intersectionality framework developed by Crenshaw (1989), so as to understand how Kashmiri women become the “other” in terms of the varied strands of identity they inhabit, and how the everyday forms of violence play out, with their bodies, psyches, and spaces becoming sites of conflict. The paper includes interviews of women survivors of violence, presenting the testimonies in a single narrative without identifying the survivors.<sup>1</sup> Taking from Scott's (1985) understanding of “everyday forms of resistance” among Malayan peasants, the paper also brings to the fore the subtle ways in which Kashmiri women are reclaiming their spaces and how these attempts construct them as frontliners resisting the brutal onslaught of a militarised state. In bringing forth narratives of Kashmiri women about violence, struggles, and survival, the paper attempts to highlight the multiple experiences of women living in a conflict zone, beyond the binaries of victim and agent, and how they negotiate their days under a militarised code of conduct.

### Gendered Constructs and Armed Conflicts

In areas of militarised conflict, gender relations are put to use to “incite, exacerbate, and fuel violence” (Giles and Hyndman 2004: 4). The body becomes a site of violence, which is marked by relations of gender, religion, class, race, ethnicity and so on. The idea of the nation posits masculinity and femininity in certain ways. As Enloe (2014: 93) argues, the construction of

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nationalism springs from “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.” In such a project, women are symbolically seen as carrying the notion of honour and identity of the nation on their backs for the men to protect.

Men living in a dangerous world are commonly imagined to be the natural protectors. Women living in a dangerous world allegedly are those who need protection ... relegated to the category of the protected ... commonly thought to be safe “at home” and, thus, incapable of realistically assessing the dangers “out there.” (Enloe 2014: 30)

However, it would be wrong to assume “male” and “female” to be homogeneous categories and to ignore the wide variety of meanings that social categorisations assume, when they are looked at in relation to the various other identities one is seen to represent. Thus, gender, class, caste and race do not simply have to be looked at in terms of the additive effect; there is a need to understand the complex, complicated, and intersectional effect of these categorisations as they form a part of the “intersectional wheel” (Anthias 2001). Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) helps to bring to the fore the varied strands of identities to explain how various forms of oppression take place as a result of specific experiences and contexts. It focuses on the ways in which one experiences, reproduces, and resists social divisions in everyday life and how they go on to reinforce inclusions and exclusions (Taylor et al 2010).

The promises of democracy and nationalistic ideals to be all-inclusive and egalitarian have found the starkest contrast in the lives of women and other marginalised groups. They exist at the fringes of the nation-building exercise, in contrast to those seen as the main actors of the process. Thus, we see how, as symbols of the nation's collective honour, women become the “other,” since they are seen to carry particular gendered, racial, ethnic, religious identities, which intersect to subject them to particular experiences. In areas of conflict, this works to make people into the “other” to be dehumanised by violence. It is a war of “us” versus “them” and, therefore, as a means of defeating the enemy, women's bodies are used like slates to convey the message of victory of the “self” and defeat and “dishonour” of the “other.” Such violence is not indiscriminate, but systemic and deliberate.

During times of conflict multiple binary constructions are formed; not only is “masculine” contrasted to “feminine” within a group and “us” contrasted to “them” between groups, but “our women” are contrasted to “their women” and “our men” to “their men.” (Alison 2007: 80)

The masculinist and feminist constructs are such that violence becomes an act of proving one's masculinity, the reason why men are thought to be the protectors of the “nation,” again thought of in terms of the image of a vulnerable woman needing protection from “other” men. Writing in the context of Palestine, Kassem (2011: 157) notes that the metaphor of the nation as a woman conflates “the political control of territory with the control of the female body and female sexuality.” This use of the nation as a metaphor has also come to be increasingly used in the Kashmir conflict by the construction of identities of the “self” and the “other.” This is done by evoking a sense of protection for the nation, spoken of in terms of

Bharat Mata—the image of a woman—threatened by the Kashmiri “other” that demands freedom, seen akin to attacking the very honour of the “motherland,” and the male warriors who come to defend it. Slogans like “Bharat Mata ki Jai” and “Mera Bharat Mahaan” are seen inscribed outside military bunkers and roadside hoardings to glorify the nation. Others like “Ajeet hain, Abheet hain” (we are victorious, we are invincible) further bring forth the use of the protectionist discourse that the Indian soldiers in Kashmir, meant to protect the integrity of the nation, are invincible. One might ask: Who is the protection needed from and who are they victorious over? Since these slogans and military installations are integrated into the civilian spaces, the message goes out to the Kashmiri “other,” who would be otherwise disciplined by violence.

### Women and Militarised Violence in Kashmir

Kashmir has been a matter of long-standing “dispute” between postcolonial India and Pakistan. There are varied accounts of what happened in Jammu and Kashmir during the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, who the invaders were, what their motive was, and if the Pakistani government was officially involved. However, these questions are beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup> What needs to be emphasised in the territorial aspect of the dispute is the human cost of the conflict.

Since 1989 especially, the armed insurgency took on an ethno-religious character and the Indian state, dealing with a severe legitimacy crisis, came down with an “iron hand.” The war not only saw the state brutally attempting to curb the insurgency, but also crush its support structure, an entire civilian population (which also had cross-border support from Pakistan). In the Indian state's attempt to gain an upper hand against Pakistan in the territorial conflict, militarisation over Kashmir became the norm, and in its attempt to create an Indian idea of the nation in Kashmir, militarisation in Kashmir became the procedure (Kazi 2009a: 67). Over 70,000 people have been killed and more than 8,000 men have been subjected to enforced disappearance by the state (IPRK and APDP 2015: 3). Beyond these statistics, militarisation has affected every aspect of people's lives, subjecting them to constant surveillance and humiliation. As Mohanty (2011: 78) argues, “militarised conditions privilege certain populations (the bona fide citizen-subject) while simultaneously dispossessing others,” who are relegated to the status of “bare life” (Agamben 2005).

An important part of the state's militarisation process has been a concerted counter-insurgency mechanism where “winning hearts and minds” of people is sought to be achieved by providing them with incentives and welfare services through projects like Operation Sadhbhavana (meaning goodwill in Hindi). This military operation has been “the state's way of building legitimacy even as coercion continued” (Mushtaq and Bukhari 2018: 83; Bhan 2013). The aim here is to attain an even stronger presence in the everyday lives of people by having access to their social spheres, setting the standards of the services they receive, and, in certain cases, even restricting or directing their choices of employment (IPRK and APDP 2015: 16). This has

gone hand in hand with the violent manifestation of the militarised state and its institutions and processes.

Quite importantly, the militarisation in Kashmir as a process has worked to manipulate and exploit the meanings and interpretations of sexual difference (Kazi 2009b). Wars are fought in the name of protecting women, who become its justification as well as the objects to be saved, or to be “dishonoured.” Elshtain’s (1987) work on World War I, Enloe’s (1993, 2014) works on the Cold War and the first Gulf War, Einsenstein’s (2004) work on the Iraq War, and Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s (2009) work on Palestine have all focused on bringing forth this relationship between gender, conflict, and militarism. Militarism does not simply extend the militarised code of conduct into civilian life; it erases the binaries between combatants and non-combatants, war and peace, home and outside, and front line and safe havens. It privileges masculinism and a devaluing of women and marginalised men, subjecting them to violence.

Gender-based violence as a feature of the Kashmir conflict has led to gendered identities becoming the sites where power is inscribed in violent ways, both subtly and overtly in all its physical, sexual, psychological and socio-economic manifestations. Women have been subjected to violence not just because they are women, but because they are seen as the “other,” in terms of being the women of the “other” who are a threat to “our” national security. Also, women are seen as the repositories of honour of the Kashmiri community that is at war with the Indian state, as having a political ideology where they are vocal about the right to self-determination, and are seen to have collaborated with India’s historical enemy, Pakistan, to demand *azaadi* (freedom). The national interest, “heavily laden with the symbols of masculine power” (Horn 2010: 60), works to dehumanise an entire population, “emasculating” the “other” men by attacking “their” women, thus relying on a complex web of violence.

As Asia Watch (1993: 1) notes, women have been subjected to physical violence, including torture and beating for accusations of links to militants or during crackdowns. Women have also been subjected to psychological violence in terms of constant threats to their lives and dignity in a militarised environment. This is in addition to the exacerbated economic deprivation faced by them in such a system.

### Testimonies of Women

The testimonies of the women survivors of violence, which I present here in narrative form, point to the varied and widespread nature of these experiences.

During the 2010 uprising, there were protests going on in our area. My mother and I were returning home from the hospital. The forces fired; my mother had 6–7 bullet injuries in her spinal cord. She was bedridden for seven months, handicapped. Then she died. (personal interview, 2015)

My brother-in-law was a militant. The army came looking for him. I was at the house. They took me instead. I was held at the nearby camp for 13 days. Inside the camp, I was beaten with rods, held by my hair and dragged around. (personal interview, 2015)

My husband and I were accused of giving shelter to militants in our house. We were taken, separately, to an army camp. I was tied with ropes; electric shocks were administered on my body. They

made me drink excessive water and would then torture me. (personal interview, 2014)

There was an encounter in our area in 2001 and an army man was killed. The army and the Special Task Force were so furious. They entered our homes and beat up the women and the elderly. These things from them were expected and common during crackdowns. Nowhere is it safe. (personal interview, 2015)

Acts of physical violence like the ones narrated by my interviewees have often happened during cordon and search operations, or when forces barge into the houses of people after an attack by militants, or during encounters. These violent practices are deeply embedded in the militaristic structure and form a part of people’s everyday experiences. While the quotidian humiliation at regular checkpoints that Kashmiri men have faced over the years has been documented (Qureshi 2004: 6; Duschinski 2009: 704; Kak 2017), highlighting women’s experiences of the everyday violence they face in a highly militarised environment is important. History is often “his-story” and interpreting women’s experiences into historical narratives questions the masculine hegemonies that otherwise “efface women as a category of analysis from the areas of public memory, transforming them into dispossessed and non-historical being” (Kassem 2011: 3).

In the case of Kashmir, the human cost of the conflict is reflected in terms of the numbers of the dead, the disappeared, and the orphaned, while the extraordinariness (extralegality) of the everyday is seen as ordinary. Also, the foregrounding representations of Kashmir tend to be about the landscape, thus, leading to an erasure of the centrality of the people and their everyday experience of a militarised life that has “transformed the social landscape into an arena of violence and repression” (Hoffman and Duschinski 2014: 511).

Girls and women, when they leave their homes, often have to hear the directive,

*Avoid the bunkers that house the uniformed men. Take an alternate road. Don't use that road unless you have to.* (Batoool et al 2016: 4; emphasis in the original).

However, as I have stated previously, the mere cautious avoidance of the outside does not mean that the “home” is a safe space. This was evident in the 1990s and early 2000s with militancy at its peak in Kashmir. The government forces cordoned areas for crackdown, on suspicion that militants were present in the area.<sup>3</sup> They did this even to get the *mukhbireen* to point out the people they suspected of being militants or having militant links or sympathising with the militants.<sup>4</sup> The male members would be asked to assemble in a nearby playground, while the females would stay back home. The government forces would conduct house-to-house searches and, often, in these situations, they would resort to sexual harassment of the women. In a harrowing memoir, a Kashmiri woman recalls the events that took place during such cordons and what it meant for the women.

They played a different kind of war with us. Only they knew where they pinched; only we knew how it felt. There was no name for it, like for rape or murder. So what happened when the same women saw Indian soldiers playing with their intimate things and taking sexual pleasure under the guise of search operations? (Yousuf 2014)



As noted in *Kashmir Imprisoned*, a report published in 1990 (qtd in Butalia 2002: 79):

There seems to be a deliberate attempt to make women the primary target of attack by the security forces. The manner in which searches and interrogations are conducted smacks of a planned strategy to break the morale of the people.

With a high military presence even in the civilian areas, the “masculinist military gaze” where women become the “objects” of the male gaze, is another form of violation. During the early 2000s, even when the militant presence was low, the harassment continued to happen. Saja (name changed), 65, recalls that period:

Army men from the nearby camp or men from the Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry would patrol the area at night and then peep in from the windows, looking at women as they slept, teasing them. Had they found an occasion when the windows were not closed, God knows what they could have done to us. But we feared them a lot, knowing how they kept peeping in all the time at night. We could not sleep properly. (personal interview, 2015)

It is reported that the Indian armed forces have used rape as a weapon of war in Kashmir (Human Rights Watch 1994). In conflicts, the physical as well as sexual violence against women is intended to send a message to the opposing group or community that the perpetrator is the victor as it attacked the very “honour” of the opposing group. In other words:

displays of machismo are enacted through violence against women who are associated with the target males. The rape of women carries a man-to-man message, showing that the targeted men are not able to protect their women. Men may interpret the sexual assault of “their” women as a direct attack on their manhood and their own integrity. In this way, “women are used as political pawns, as symbols of the potency of the men to whom they belong.” (Reid-Cunningham 2008: 282)

Although there is no evidence to suggest that sexual violence by Indian armed forces in Kashmir is a part of the state’s official policy, yet the way such acts have been carried out with the state providing absolute impunity to the perpetrators and dismissing the testimonies from the survivors as propaganda and “recorded rotten stereo sounds that play rape all over again” (Parvez 2014), points to a systemic and systematic way in which such acts occur with the silent complicity of the state.<sup>5</sup> Women in Kashmir have been subjected to sexual violence, including individual acts of rape by soldiers as well as mass rapes, both of which point out to the larger system of oppression and impunity that the state provides to its forces accused of such crimes. Such acts of violence have been committed to “feminise” the victim and, thereby, seek to dominate over the sexual as well as the religious, ethnic, and political identity to which the victim belongs, while at the same time seeking to empower and make more masculinised the perpetrator’s identity.

I was tied up to the table, naked, in a nearby camp, after they asked me to provide details of a neighbour who was a militant. They poured hot polythene over my private parts. I don’t remember what happened after that. (personal interview, 2015)

My husband was taken to the camp. We were accused of sheltering militants. It was just the two of us; we have no children. Then they

came on the pretext of searching the house and raped me inside my own home in the dark of the night. (personal interview, 2015)

Cases like Kunan Poshpora provide a telling example of the use of mass rape to terrorise an entire population, as Skjelsbaek and Smith (2001: 5) write,

Those who are ruthless enough to launch a war in which civilians themselves are the target are therefore likely to find that rape can be a convenient and effective weapon.

On the night of 23–24 February 1991, soldiers from the 4th Rajputana Rifles of the 68th Brigade barged into homes in this north Kashmir hamlet and raped around 53 women while the men were interrogated in the cold outside (Batool et al 2016: 80).

Our homes suddenly turned into centers of violence. Rooms remind us. Our bodies bear witness. Our wounds bleed and they will speak. (Falak 2013)

The subsequent reopening of the case has only seen denials from the state and accusations against the survivors as well as the petitioners. In addition to Kunan Poshpora, the accusations against Indian soldiers of raping Kashmiri women have been levelled numerous other times like the Mubina Gani case (1990), where a bride was raped on her wedding night, or Pazipora (1990), Haran (1992), Handwara (1992, 2004) and Shopian (2009) not only highlight a legacy of sexual violence against Kashmiri women by the Indian forces, but also a lack of prosecution. This implies that the state is not averse to using it as a strategy to break the will of the Kashmiri people in their struggle for freedom from occupation.<sup>6</sup>

### Kashmiri Women as Frontliners

Despite facing violence on several fronts, the story of Kashmiri women needs to be heard beyond the victimhood discourse in order to understand how they have survived the violence over the decades. In this context, Manchanda (2001: 20) writes,

Women’s negotiations with violent conflicts create historically and situationally specific economic, social, cultural, ethnic and national realities that form a new knowledge base and resource.

While historically the front line has been looked at as a place where the “actual” fighting between the warring groups occurs and where most damage is done, feminist analysis over the years has challenged this notion of the “front line.” Both in the physical and symbolic sense, they have reinterpreted a “front line” as a “space where the traditional boundaries of public and private space are blurred” (Dowler 2002: 162), and as transformative spaces where “women’s voices challenge and enrich simultaneous struggles” (Waller and Rycenga 2002: xxii). Thus, as women’s bodies are marked violently in “safe spaces” and as they chalk out ways to resist militarisation, the front line becomes the home, which is militarised and also turns into a site of resistance. The front line becomes the body, psyche, and memories where the war is played out. What Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009: 34) explains for Palestine, fits the Kashmir scenario as well.

The frontliner can be a woman who is lining up or is humiliated at a checkpoint, a woman singing her children to sleep in the middle of night raids and incursions, one selling yogurt to make some additional money and buy food for her children, a woman giving birth at a

checkpoint because she has been prevented from reaching a hospital, or one screaming and crying in court while refusing to accept the law's failure to protect her rights.

The popular understanding of women's agency in conflict often tends to see it as women who are fighting in struggles for national liberation or simply surviving as hapless victims (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009: 50), but it is in these ordinary acts that the forms of everyday resistance (Scott 1985) become clear. As Scott (1985) argues, it is a constant struggle and may not even account for collective action corresponding to in-frapolitics as against the conventional forms of political resistance. This is not to assume that these acts are not political or that a clear demarcation could be drawn between what is outright and overt in the form of armed struggles, and what is subtle and covert in the form of the everyday struggles. These exist on a continuum and in relation to each other in developing a broader culture of resistance.

As Aaliya Anjum (2011) notes, in the early years when the Kashmiri armed movement started, women took to facilitating the men in their fight by acting as couriers who took arms from one place to another. As they could pass checkpoints without being suspected, they could inform the militants of the position of the forces, and help them flee in case of sudden cordons. Women have participated in the protests with heightened participation in the 2008–10 and the 2016 uprisings, taken out all-women marches shouting slogans for freedom, and joined the stone-pelting men. This "gendered resistance," as Ather Zia (2017) notes, has been integral to Kashmir's social fabric. Kashmiri women have a long history of protesting atrocities and resisting in their own ways, right from the time of the Mughal rule in Kashmir (Gazi 2017).

The women also "brought the private act of mourning into the public space and politicizing it into a formidable tool of moral protest against state injustice" (Banerjee 2008: 150). This is epitomised by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, headed by Parveena Ahangar, which brings together families of the disappeared, who stage a sit-in on the 10th of every month, seeking the whereabouts of those subjected to enforced disappearances. During the funerals of militants,

women "break out into a *wanuwun*, the traditional Kashmiri song of celebration, intertwining couplets in praise of local *mujahids* (militants)" (Manchanda 2001: 51). Not only do the women use the "public space" to register their protest against the oppressive state structure, their resilience also shows in the everyday in terms of how the home, rather than being a private sphere in statist terms, becomes a site where they have to struggle on a daily basis. These struggles, visible or invisibilised, overt or covert, institutionalised or random, go on to indicate how the home–outside binary does not indicate safety, and neither are women simply to be placed in the binary categorisations of victim and agent.

Women have also used the law for memorialisation. A case in point is the public interest litigation filed by 50 women in 2013 at the Srinagar High Court seeking reinvestigation into the Kunan Poshpora mass rapes. Although the Supreme Court later stayed the proceedings of the case, what it was essentially aimed at was not to seek justice per se, but,

to expose the judiciary being part of state oppression, to make use of law in order to preserve memory which is a powerful weapon, for it is in our remembrance that our resistance lies.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusions

It is not the case that women suffering violence have no ability to act, neither does the recognition of women's agency mean that they have overcome the violence and it no longer affects them. Surviving the everyday troubles of militarisation and facing its multifaceted gender-based violent manifestations means that women have to cope with having their bodies treated as battlegrounds. They have to hold their families intact and "construct counter-spaces that allow them to survive and to envision that they might someday attain the justice they have so longed for" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009: 187). In this paper, I have argued that women cannot simply be placed between the binaries of "victims of violence" and "agents of peace," and even when seen as survivors, witnesses or frontliners resisting militarised violence in the everyday, the analysis must not fall prey to romanticising a notion of resistance that invisibilises the violence, despair, and resilience of women's lives in conflicts.

## NOTES

- 1 Interviewees' names are anonymous. Interviews were conducted by the author as part of her PhD fieldwork during 2014 and 2015.
- 2 The departure of the British colonisers from the Indian subcontinent in 1947 witnessed the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, ruled by a Dogra Maharaja, acceding to neither India nor Pakistan. However, a popular uprising in Poonch that had started prior to the partition gained increasing momentum following the division, resulting in the Maharaja's forces massacring 2,37,000 Muslims (Naqvi 2016) even as a provincial "Azad Kashmir" government was proclaimed to have been formed in Rawalpindi. This was followed by a "tribal invasion" (Lamb 1991; Snedden 2013) resulting in the Maharaja signing a temporary Instrument of Accession with India which brought the Indian army to Kashmir and later, India taking the matter to the United Nations to complain against Pakistan.

- 3 The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) gives security forces the right to enter or search any premise in order to make arrests (of anyone who has committed cognisable offences or is suspected of doing so), or to recover any person wrongfully restrained, or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and seize it.
- 4 Plural for *mukhbir* which is used in the Kashmiri parlance for the informers, local people who provide Indian forces with the information about the whereabouts of militants or their supporters. Usually during crackdowns, men would be paraded in front of a masked mukhbir, who would then point out to the forces of any suspects who would then be bundled up in the vehicle and taken away for interrogation to undisclosed torture cells, in many cases to return dead, or severely tortured, or just disappear.
- 5 Not only has the state over the years rejected such allegations of sexual violence as baseless and an attempt by militant sympathisers to defame the Indian forces and bring international

- attention to Kashmir, it has also ensured that the forces are not prosecuted. Even in cases where first information reports are filed, prior sanction is needed for prosecution. The whole system, from the laws to the courts to the institutions and process form "structures of violence" that provide absolute immunity to the forces.
- 6 For more on this, see Asia Watch (1993), reports by IPTK and APDP (2012, 2015).
  - 7 Personal interview with one of the 50 women petitioners of the case, 12 August 2016.

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# The Intimate World of *Vyestoan*

## Affective Female Alliances and Companionships of Resistance in Kashmir

UZMA FALAK

Through ethnographic vignettes and auto-ethnographic fragments of women's intimate worlds in Kashmir, women's congregations, female alliances, friendships, embodied practices, and everyday memory projects are examined, arguing that these constitute an alternate affect and episteme in Kashmir. The concept of *vyestoan* is introduced as a critical, affective female alliance and companionship of resistance hinged on the notion of witnessing, in life, death, and beyond. This critical female alliance, against several interlocked forms of domination, is proposed as a useful term, rather than the notion of "sisterhood" in feminist scholarship, to understand intersectionality and criticality particularly in the context of Kashmir.

Ceaseless rhythmic thumping of the *tumbakhnaer*<sup>1</sup> filled the autumnal night air with a strange possibility. Whiffs and the silence of tall pines coalesced with smoke and the sound of burning wood of the *verr*<sup>2</sup> as food for celebration was being prepared. Women who had gathered in the colourful tent sculpted the night with their handclaps, beats of the *tumbakhnaer* resting in their laps, the cling of keys and the copper *nout* (a pot used as a hand drum). Incessantly, the women whirled. Singing in the traditional call-and-response style, where a group of women sing to "call" for a "response" from the other group, their antiphonal singing turned hours of the night into a rhythmic conversation. Endless cups of brewing *nunchai* (Kashmir's everyday salty milk tea) from the samovar were passed around. Sleep was as distant as the Pir Panjal, the hazy contours of which were visible amid the dense night fog. The bride's friend sang *cheshman che gaash-nevaan* and the refrain travelled far to the distant mountains, as we all sang together *yeti bhaer bhaer kaet malguzaar yewaan*.<sup>3</sup> An obscure sense of longing persisted.

Women filled Rukhsana's hands with henna in intricate patterns, as if inscribing secrets on her palm. Rukhsana's confidante, Parveena Ahanger, sat next to her and sang along. Rukhsana was a little girl when, accompanied by her grandfather Jamaal Dar, she would travel every month from their village Pahaldej in Handwor for the sit-ins and protests of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP)—a collective of relatives of those subjugated to enforced and involuntary disappearances in Kashmir—in Srinagar's Pratap Park demanding the whereabouts of her father Fatah Muhammad, who was subjected to enforced disappearance in 2000. It was here that she met Parveena, Haleema and Sabia, who, along with other women from her village, were now singing at the *maenzraat* (night of the henna) of her wedding.

As the women sang, a strange haptic moment, a certain haunting bound us, creating a different time and a different space. It seemed like everyone's loss and mourning had survived a body search, crossed a certain checkpoint, a certain border, and were now in an assembly; each articulation was distinct yet coalesced into an ephemeral collective, manifesting itself into a longing and a cry. Several such cries echoed that night from the colourful tent. Suddenly, a woman in the gathering beat the *tumbakhnaer* in a discordant way, signalling a change of rhythm. The song of grief and mourning was punctuated by a swift change of rhythm and tune from a certain drum

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accompanied by an impromptu humorous verse, and thus the otherwise crying congregation suddenly burst into a song of laughter. Soon, women began dancing, bodies oscillated, arms and feet moved. These movements engendered an affectivity that one could, as it were, touch.

This women's gathering, which I was a part of, at Pahaldej village in 2013, brings us to the heart of my undertaking in this paper in which I reflect on women's congregations, female alliances, friendships and embodied practices, arguing that these constitute an alternate affect and episteme in Kashmir. Here, I attempt to bring these discussions to life through ethnographic vignettes and auto-ethnographic fragments of women's intimate worlds in Kashmir. One of my major undertakings will be working through a concept of critical female alliance of resistance, which I call *vyestoan*. In Koshur, Kashmir's native language, *vyes* refers to a female friend and *vyestoan* is a term for female friendships. I hope to delineate notions of in-betweenness and liminality which come closest to an indefinable and obscure, yet a powerful force that I have felt amid women gathered at weddings, funerals, protest marches, mosques and other myriad spaces and times, and beyond. Therefore, in some sense, this paper is a site of struggle with (and within) the confines of language to articulate the embodied, particularly this affectivity of a women's gathering that I first felt as a child when my grandmother took me to the mosque for women's congregational prayers and which continues to hold me in its tender and poignant grip.

The women's congregation at Rukhsana's maenzraat created several translations and transformations. As women sang, *Zanei soi koor yemis daydi jaan ravaan, yeti bhaer bhaer kaet malguzaar yewaan*, a different time and space of collective mourning was produced, intersecting the space and time characterised by celebration.<sup>4</sup> The gathering of women, their "appearance," was haunted by the enforced disappearance of Rukhsana's father. Her wedding celebration was haunted by the mourning and commemoration for not only her missing father, but Parveena's son, Haleema's husband, and many a *cheshman hend gaash* (light of the eyes) evoked by the song, who remain buried in the endless *malguzaar* of Kashmir.<sup>5</sup> These translations between bodies, acts, living, dead, and disappeared, and this embodiment of several spatialities and temporalities form one of the anchors of resistance in Kashmir.

A similar transformation takes place during the monthly protest meetings of the APDP in Srinagar. Those who were subjected to enforced disappearances "appear" through the bodies of their family members, who wear their images certifying both their presence and absence. As women assemble, greet, hug, laugh and talk, a space of protest, mourning and remembrance is transformed into a space of celebration; not only of persistence and struggle but of alliance, friendships and mobility as well.<sup>6</sup> The women, thus, enact memory and collective trauma, initiating intergenerational "acts of transfer" (Taylor 2003).<sup>7</sup>

The night of fellowship at Rukhsana's maenzraat ended amid laughter, chit-chats, and whimpers. Morning light filtered through the window and reflected on a mud wall contouring the window itself. In this window of light on the wall, I saw

Rukhsana's silhouette, disentangling her hair. Her bridal dress still neatly folded, coloured shiny bottles, hair clips, moth balls, and knick-knacks were scattered like her hair. This visible and invisible portrait, this silhouette sculpting the light, is how I was to remember Rukhsana years after: an intense portrait of presence and absence.

### Women's Assemblies as Political Enactment

Walking back from a milkmaid's shop across the road, Nasreena Akhter greets me and we walk through the remnants of an expansive military bunker in Batmaluen towards her home. A few stairs lead up to a blue-walled room. On the window, hangs a garland of dried chillies. She describes how at the onset of the mass armed struggle for liberation in 1989, homes turned into centres of violence:

Men were taken out during crackdowns. We were caged inside our homes. Troopers would lock us inside and shout swear words. They broke our doors, walls, windows, took our belongings, even pliers and screw drivers. They would frisk our trunks, rice and flour canisters, coal, sugar, clothes, water storage tanks, chicken coops. (personal interview, 2013)

A thin wooden frame, the only adornment on the wall, holds a vivid colour photograph of one of the women's rallies in Srinagar from the 1990s. Women in their black veils, white butter-crêpe burqas, and coloured scarves stand together in a cluster. A young Nasreena stands in the middle of the gathering, her fists defiantly raised, her slightly open mouth ready to pierce the air with a freedom slogan. The tension her presence creates in the photographic composition extends beyond the frame. It seems the photograph will either come to life or the tension will tear it apart. I look at an older Nasreena across the blue-walled room. She smiles, reminiscing:

How much can one put into words? I would travel miles to join funeral processions of the martyrs. *Mei ous jazbe* [I had passion]. I would leave home without thinking twice. I was an ardent sloganeer. In 1992, when the call *Tchar Chalo*<sup>8</sup> was announced, everyone left their homes—men, women, children. Homes were deserted. Freedom appeared very near.

As the notion of home, conceived as a safe space, was ruptured, women found a new home where they felt safe and strong—in togetherness.

A perpetual mourning lingered in our homes. Sudden crackdowns were announced. We couldn't stay indoors. We would occupy the streets, alleys and be together. We felt safe and strong this way. We braved many nights on the streets. We would march and sing for our martyrs: *Kya tse marnukh goi bahano, janano bei walo* [How did death overtake you? Come back my beloved, won't you?] (personal interview with Neelam, 2013)

Emphasising the corporeality of a persisting and resisting body, Judith Butler (2015: 161) significantly argues that assembling or coming together is already an enactment of a popular will and has an "expressive function prior to any claim or utterance it may make." In other words, as she notes, "the enactment of 'we the people' may or may not take a linguistic form; speech and silence, movement and immobility, are all political enactments" (2015: 172).

During long spells of crackdown, women would spread mats and blankets on the streets and assemble, organise community kitchens, or distribute food among neighbourhoods under relentless curfews and crackdowns. They contributed money to buy bread and food for men who would be forcibly asked to assemble outside their homes during long hours of search and cordon operations.

In instances such as these where the boundary between the public and private crumbles, where people stand, sit, breathe, sing, sleep, mourn, cook, and eat on the street, Butler asserts that the demonstrators put their body on the line in its “insistence, obduracy and precarity, overcoming the distinction between public and the private,” challenging not only the legitimacy of the state, “but also maintaining themselves as persisting bodies with needs, desires, and requirements” (2015: 97–98).

Rasheeda and Nayeema, two sexagenarian sisters, correct each other for details, pausing intermittently, negotiating the vagaries of memory, the tellings and retellings as they describe decades of their underground and resilient lives. They are bound in a *vyestooan* which strengthens and at the same time transcends their blood-sisterhood. Rasheeda serves tea and peeled almonds while they sketch for me their militant lives. While some stories get them laughing and animated, some make them cry, others they narrate in hushed voices, and many others perhaps defy language. Rasheeda narrates:

We would bang roofs and tin drums in defiance to communicate we were fearless and not scared of their bullets. We confronted the troops with sticks, *kanger* [a portable earthen fire pot encased in woven wicker used to keep warm in winters], shoes, whatever means we had at hand. The troops would go on a rampage in our homes looking for guns. I once dared them by saying that there were no weapons in the house. I told them: Perhaps, we are the weapons you are looking for; arrest us and your hounding will end! (personal interview, 2013)

Recalling the protest and solidarity rallies of the 1990s, Rasheeda remembers how they tore off black veils when they did not have flags to carry to a procession owing to stringent restrictions.

We tore the black burqas, stitched them into flags and marched on the streets shouting: *Hum Kya Chahtey? Azaadi!* [What do we want? Freedom!] Our passionate slogans stirred the earth.

Her sister Nayeema interjects:

Those were our years of youth, hope and spirit. Everyone walked together. The poets walked with us. Marching onto the streets, we sang songs of loss and revolt. *Yem vedaakh aeis andrei vesaan* [a fervent gush coming forth from some intrinsic source found words].

### Songs of Resistance

Women's songs in Kashmir form an important repertoire of resistance. Enacting cultural agency and encoding resistance into cultural memory, women's intimate worlds of singing rendered (and continue to render) the political struggle into poetry. Songs which women sang in *Pahaldej* or those which Nayeema and Neelam referred to are songs of collective loss and longing, media of protest, mobilisation and solidarity, and significantly, an enactment of a collective articulation of freedom. Offering alternate ways of knowing, these songs challenge “established

practices of remembering and forgetting” and “insurrect the perspectives that culturally hegemonic practices have foreclosed” (Medina 2011). They emerge from, in the words of Ariel Dorfman (2007) in his epilogue to *Poems from Guantanamo*, a “simple, almost primeval, arithmetic of breathing in and out” which keeps us alive. What Butler, in her *Frames of War*, says about the “written” poems of the Guantanamo detainees, holds true of the songs in Kashmir:

To say that the poems resist that sovereignty is not to say that they will alter the course of war or will ultimately prove more powerful than the military power of the state. But the poems clearly have political consequences—emerging from scenes of extraordinary subjugation, they remain proof of stubborn life, vulnerable, overwhelmed, their own and not their own, dispossessed, enraged, and perspicacious. As a network of transitive affects, the poems—their writing and their dissemination—are critical acts of resistance, insurgent interpretations, incendiary acts that somehow, incredibly, live through the violence they oppose, even if we do not yet know in what ways such lives will survive. (Butler 2016: 62)

Understanding these songs as challenging statist knowledge production and as offering alternate ways of knowing offers several critical possibilities. These songs, for example, not only enact embodied memory, but also may offer nuanced reflections on resistance and embodiment itself. For instance, “*Hum Kya Chahtey? Azaadi!*” is a popular slogan enacting a collective longing for freedom in Kashmir, and in one of its renditions, freedom is inscribed on the mountains, rivers, soil, body, and soul (Ahmed 2012). A nuanced reading of the song, I argue, enables us to read it as a critical reflection on embodiment itself. The notion of embodiment moves beyond the understanding of the body as a physiological entity and explores the “phenomenal” body focusing on unified experiences and potentials, beyond rigid binaries and dualisms such as the Cartesian split of the body and mind. The song of *azaadi* inscribes “freedom” transcending various binaries—body/soul, material/spirit, reason/emotion, nature/culture, history/memory, life/death, individual/collective—and creates a porosity between these dualities and other evocations of landscapes, proximity, intimacy, desire, promise, voice, and movement in relation to occupation and resistance, offering, thus, a poetic thesis of embodied resistance.

In a historical continuum, the political uprising of the 1990s too catalysed women's mobilisation and new friendships emerged out of the chance meetings during protests, marches, assemblies, and funeral processions.<sup>9</sup> These gathering also brought together women from different socio-economic backgrounds transcending the barriers of caste, class, and regions, thus forging a critical intersectionality. However, no sphere can claim to be entirely inclusive. As Judith Butler (2015: 51) notes, “every form of appearance is constituted by its outside and there can be no entry into the sphere of appearance without a critique of the differential form of power by which that sphere is constituted.” This, however, she explains, is not a reason to abort the struggle but the only reason to insist upon the struggle as ongoing. Moreover, “appearing” is not understood as synonymous with resistance. Not “appearing” or assembling may indicate the strategic possibilities and methods of persistence.

In Kashmir, such assemblies are not understood within the democratic logic of the right to freedom of assembly; such gatherings enact a rejection of the Indian state as the guarantor of rights. As demonstrations turn into funerals and vice versa, every death in Kashmir indicates and enacts the death of the state.<sup>10</sup> It is an enactment understood beyond the language of the constitutional law and rights even though the region and its people's lives are complexly involved and interlaced within the structures of law. Moreover, though such assemblies are ephemeral, their "transience is linked to their critical function" (Butler 2015: 20).

As women gather, assemble, and forge alliances and companionships, their bodies embodying and enacting several alternate temporalities and modalities of being give way to a liminal, timeless space abounding with possibilities of liberation. The in-betweenness constituted by their bodies and modalities of being characterised by a liminal space and time is the site of an alternate affect, one of the bedrocks of resistance in Kashmir. While bodies are arrested, killed, maimed, and violated, this in-betweenness and its affectivity escapes the grip of the state's power and persists as an articulation of a collective longing and struggle. While this in-betweenness is constituted by intimacy and proximity, it goes beyond both, reclaiming what the state renders unfamiliar through its complex repressive mechanisms of control. Liminality and in-betweenness not only mark people's times and spaces in Kashmir, but also characterise people's lives. Kashmir and its people, though, are complexly entangled within the framework of the Indian state's law and legality, yet they refuse to embody a statist temporality and modality of being by a profound articulation of self-determination and liberation. The "liminal" bodies create a "timelessness" where freedom and its possibilities are articulated. These critical linkages between liminality, in-betweenness, and the resistance movement in Kashmir are manifested in, what I call, hauntology of liberation—an anti-occupational liberatory praxis characterised by alternate ways of knowing, which allows us to imagine and navigate alternate temporalities, spatialities, and modalities of being and, thus, alternate selfhoods.

Misra, an elderly woman, who narrates to me the courageous stories of her confrontation with the troops during the 1990s, poignantly articulates what it meant for women to assemble:

No one could afford or bear to stay in isolation behind closed doors. We were alive and we had to communicate that. (personal interview, 2013)

### Dreams and Their 'Share in History'

Parveena Ahanger narrates to me the only dream she has had of her missing son Javaid Ahmed Ahanger. The sun has set and the lilting azan from a local mosque intersperses her dream narration, as she warms her hands over the kanger. She recalls:

It was a long time ago, on the night of Qadr, when we still lived at our old house in Batmaluen, I dreamt of him. I am alive, I am in their custody, they have hidden me mother, he said to me in my dream. They tell me, your mother is searching for you. Only your mother. (personal interview, 2013)

After her son's disappearance, Parveena cried relentlessly and felt she was unable to carry on. She says she travelled to far off places, to every prison, every interrogation centre in search of her son and could not pay attention to her family and the household. Her neighbours attended to the household chores in her absence.

Parveena's daughter, Saima, who was four years old at the time her brother was picked up, was intensely disturbed by not only her brother's sudden absence but also her mother's grief. She says:

Loss almost turned her [Parveena] mad. I couldn't bear my brother's absence and my mother's grief. Home was the last place I wanted to be at. I spent several months at my relative's places. (personal interview, 2013)

Gradually, Parveena, in search of her son, met other women who too were searching for their disappeared family members. They started meeting regularly, on the 15th and 30th of each month at Parveena's home where she would prepare tea and food for everyone, or in public parks where they would hold dharnas and sit-ins under Chinara trees and write their protest messages on pieces of paper. These small initial meetings and individual struggles forged into a collective; the APDP was thus born in 1994. Over the years, it has emerged as a vibrant political space primarily of women's mobilisation, solidarity, and friendships. Parveena remarks that APDP is her only *rishte* [family] now. The APDP family consists of about 1,000 members who meet every month for a protest and commemoration. Saima says:

Soon after my mother started meeting other women regularly, she slowly resurfaced from the depths of grief she had plunged into. It gave her strength and we saw a visible change in her. She forged new bonds. I too joined this collective struggle and started participating more actively. APDP has become a new family for us. I am particularly fond of a little girl in the collective. Her father is among the disappeared. She too hates going to her home like I used to. I understand her like no one can. While she has found a friend in me, she too gives meaning to my life. We often talk for hours over the phone. Her internal battles remind me of my own. (personal interview, 2013)

Like other members of the collective, Parveena and Saima, bound by a similar (not same) loss and struggle, forged a bond enriching not only their mother-daughter relationship but also extending beyond it, into a *vyestoon*, as confidantes in a common political struggle. The members of the collective forged enduring bonds, creating a new "social network of hands" towards the sustenance of the struggle (Butler 2015). It is this network of hands that Parveena perhaps hinted at when she, referring to the larger APDP family, expressed her hope and wish—*myaen aathe gasan palzin*—using the metaphor of hands she implied that she (her hands) wishes to be of assistance and help.

The waiting, remembering and longing of the APDP is strung in a song which many women sing as an articulation of their struggle. Parveena sings it to me:

*Ma tou raav tam, venye chuko vaense kam*  
[Do not go, you are still young]  
*Ma tou raav tam venye cheya maenze namm,*  
[Do not go, my bridegroom]  
*Naad laye myani Yusuf walo*  
[I call out to you, Oh my Yusuf, come!]

This song and its several versions are in circulation within women's oral traditions in Kashmir, and has multilayered references.<sup>11</sup> However, one of the two obvious references in popular circulation is the Kashmir's 16th-century poet Habba Khatoon's longing for her husband Yousuf Shah Chak, who, as the last king of Kashmir opposed Mughal expansion, was tricked into parley and was thereafter exiled to Bihar. The second reference is to the Quranic story of Prophet Yusuf, son of Prophet Yaqub. The Quran refers to the intense patience, faith, and waiting of Prophet Yaqub for his favourite son Yusuf, who is a master at interpreting dreams and whose envious half-brothers throw him into a well. The story is poignantly structured, starting with a dream and ending with an interpretation of the dream. Encapsulating several temporalities and spatialities, the song of Yusuf in Kashmir thus encodes hope and resistance into a multilayered cultural memory.

This memory work in songs is closely related to the embodied practice of dreams. Like Parveena, for many women, dream-visions remain significant ways of maintaining ties with the dead and the disappeared. Walter Benjamin (1996) reminds us that "Dreaming has a share in history." In this context, I understand dreams as everyday practices of resistance and memory, which are shaped by the political conditions and in turn have political implications. Dreams are particularly significant in understanding the complex engagement that a resisting people have with time and space challenging the statist notions and manipulations of time and space. Understanding dreams beyond the subject-centred paradigms as a form of "ethical-political engagement" helps us understand visitational dreams (such as Parveena's) as "ethically compelling precisely because of its dialogical nature" (Mittermaier 2010). Such dreams, Mittermaier expounds, call for a response; they address the dreamer, and they simultaneously constitute her as an ethically responsible being. Dreams compel us to look at "in-betweenness" as opening critical possibilities (beyond the Cartesian split of the body and mind and other dualisms) of inter-relational ethicality as opposed to the statist notion of individualism and neo-liberal rationality.

An articulation of the essence of Parveena's struggle in her own words, I propose, is a possible interpretation, which I offer here, of her dream (with which I open this section) and this restates the counter-hegemonic possibilities of dream-work. She says:

Our pain is the same and so is our struggle. There is a closure in death. But the disappeared have no graves. It is a festering wound. The state thinks we will get tired but we won't. We will keep walking tirelessly. It has been two decades but the hope, to hear my son knock at the door, persists. Sometimes when there is a knock, I think that may be it is him. I share this feeling with the other women of the collective. We will not forget and we pledge to fight together. (personal interview, 2013)

### Intimate Spheres and Subversive Solidarity

As the fierce Chenab flows in Kishtwar, a shrine stands in gossamer silence broken only by the mutterings of a woman sitting on its stairs near the threshold. Inside the shrine is a small door separated by a curtain. I try to peek in but cannot

see through the dense dark. I bend my head and step inside as my eyes negotiate the darkness in this small chamber which appears to be a private prayer room only for women, honouring a local woman saint buried there. I see a group of women sitting next to each other, whispering, reciting verses in sing-song voices, and moving their bodies in a rhythmic to and fro, like a pendulum. In the seclusion of this room, several coloured threads are tied in a close embrace, holding onto each other as if in a moment of emergency. Suddenly, a cry of one woman punctuates the antiphony of silence and lilt. The woman sitting next to her frees her lament too, joined by the other women in the circle, one by one, carefully crossing a barricade. The whimpers which began in an ascending tempo now become a sustained cry, as if all the women have transcended. I feel like an intruder and escape the dark room to watch the flowing Chenab, light gnawing at my eyes.

Such women's "intimate zones of everyday life" overcome the dichotomies of the public and the private space, and give way to critical spaces of radical possibilities (Berlant 1998). These constitute counter-hegemonic, to use Berlant's term, "intimate publics." For Berlant (1998), "intimacy refers to more than that which takes place within the purview of institutions, the state, and an ideal of publicness." Weber (2009) notes that, for Berlant, intimate public spheres are "an amalgam of primarily woman-produced, woman-consumed, and woman-coded texts, functioning to create an elaborate imaginary of intimacy that assumes women share a bond of communal longing."

Several such everyday intimate spheres characterise women's lifeworlds in Kashmir. Trips to collect wood and wild herbs, assembling at the *yaarbal* (riverbanks), working in the fields, gathering to spin yarn, husking, winnowing, pounding chillies, or separating stamens from the saffron flower to extract the spice, going to the mosque or swimming in the village ponds, singing during weddings, or mourning rituals, protest rallies, sit-ins and marches—all binding women not only to each other, but forging a relationship of love and labour, bodies and landscape, liberation, and support.

One such intimate world, for instance, is the *yaarbal* (literally a place for friends), where women, young and old, would fix a time to meet other women. *Yaarbal* would buzz with activities and friendships. Women would wash clothes and utensils, collect water, bathe, and also use this as a meeting place for conversations and songs, stories of grief and endurance. Big stones and boulders lying around naturally became resting places and hours would pass quickly at the *yaarbal*. Together, women would collect wood and herbs like *hand*, *liss*, *nunar*, *gul*, *kretch*, *bhum*, mobilising women on an everyday basis, beyond the occasions of *khaer* and *sharr* [celebrations and difficult times]. While intimate spheres like *yaarbal* helped sustain older friendships, new companions were welcome into this subversive fold of support and solidarity. Similarly, during the thrashing and winnowing periods in the field, women came together and sang long narrative oral poems to carry on through the long working hours (personal interview with Mubeena/AG, 2018). The singing and dancing practices of



Roff, Wanwun, and Hikar also give way to intimate proximities; women hold each other's hands or wrap their hands around each other's bodies, or hold on to each other's shoulders, coordinating their body and feet movement, entrusting themselves to each other while gyrating and swirling, holding each other firmly, creating an intimate trellis of trust and support.

The military presence in the region and its several manifestations, on the one hand, interrupted some of these intimate worlds, and, at the same time, the resistance movement forged other new ones imbuing them with new meanings and catalysing some others. During curfews and crackdowns, for instance, women constituted these intimate spheres to derive strength, carving a shared space of tellings and retellings, forging communication and navigating across people's resistance networks, thus fostering a critical fellowship.

I argue that women's embodied practices and intimate worlds, or, to invoke Connerton (1989), the bodily acts and commemorative practices, such as assemblies and marches, friendships, dreams, songs and mourning, among others, constitute an episteme and offer counter-hegemonic ways of knowing. These constitute vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity. Through Taylor's thesis, which aims to decolonise our understanding of "knowledge" and dismantle the conventional equation of memory with what is written, we could aim to decentre the centrality of the written word (which has been the monopoly of the state and its powerful structures in Kashmir) where history and historiography are concerned and, thus, expand our understanding of what constitutes knowledge or episteme (Taylor 2003).

### A Companionship of Resistance

Women's embodied practices, everyday memory projects, and intimate worlds shape and are shaped by, give way to and are informed by, what I have called *vyestoan*—a critical and affective female alliance and friendship, a companionship of resistance. Significantly, this alliance is hinged upon, I propose, a notion of witnessing. *Vyestoan* is an alliance of witnesses, in life, death, and beyond.

In this paper, I have tried to describe this *vyestoan* through an exploration of women's worlds in Kashmir. In one of the poems of Habba Khatoon, whose poetry continues to nourish and articulate a collective yearning, this *vyestoan* is eloquently brought to life. *Wale Vyes* (Come O Friend), a call to a female friend, is a repeated occurrence in the poem; a similar call to a female confidante also forms a marked feature of several other everyday songs sung by women in Kashmir.

This critical female alliance, I argue, is an alliance against several interlocked forms of domination. *Vyestoan*, I propose, is a useful term, rather than the notion of "sisterhood" in feminist scholarship, to understand intersectionality and criticality especially in the context of Kashmir. While the notion of sisterhood in feminist scholarship has been critiqued (hooks 1997; Mohanty 2003) that it overlooks the differences among women and does not employ a critical lens where race, class, colonialism and militarisation are considered and while sisterhood indicates a common source emphasising kinship, *vyestoan* on the other

hand extends beyond the claims of kinship, as I have shown. In Kashmir's context, if a mother and daughter, for example, share a good relationship, it is said that they are like friends (*vyes*). Therefore, the notion of *vyestoan* has radical possibilities extending beyond the notion of kinship and blood relations.

*Vyestoan* could be ephemeral and transient, constituting itself strategically in moments demanding such alliance, or it may be enduring and forged into lifelong friendships. It is potentially latent or active. The claims of *vyestoan* could extend beyond life too. For instance, the expression, *mei vaedze yele ba marai*, mourn for me when I die, is often a wish expressed by women to their close friends. *Vyestoan* creates and flourishes on the critical possibilities offered by liminality and in-betweenness, coalesced together into a hauntology of liberation. *Vyestoan* enacts myriad manifestations of agency and a resistance against the state's exoticisation, victimisation, and pathologisation vis-à-vis the resistance movement. It could be understood as a rejection of the statist notion of empowerment, interlaced within which is its ideological project of territorial integration.<sup>12</sup>

This critical alliance is not hinged merely on a common pain or a common victimhood, but plural shared-ness of strengths, struggles, and resistance against oppression and its myriad structures and manifestations.

Mogal Maas was one of the first members to join APDP. She had come searching for Parveena to her house when they "had only three photographs." Over the years their friendship, an exercise in hope, grew stronger. Mogal Maas and Parveena Ahanger's bond is a profound reflection and manifestation of this *vyestoan*. Mogal Maas would often slip into spells of soliloquy. She would talk to the walls or her *jajeer* (hubble-bubble or hookah)—her faithful friends. This is how she would fight time and the waiting it entails. Mogal Maas and Parveena Ahanger's *vyestoan* emerged out of a shared struggle and a mutual longing. Both were fighting time.

Having separated from her husband, Mogal Maas was a single mother of her lone son Nazir Ahmed Teli. Nazir, a school teacher, was subjected to enforced disappearance in 1990 and since then she kept waiting for his return. She died in October 2009 and rests close to Kashmiri poet Abdul Ahad Zargar's grave. When waiting weighed her down, she would long for Parveena, her confidante, her companion. Mogal Maas often played little pranks by requesting her neighbour to phone Parveena and announce that she had died. At her behest, her neighbour would put on the phone loudspeaker. Mogal Maas would then lean her ear towards the phone and quietly wait for her friend's reply. Parveena knew this prank well and it would always end with the women bursting into laughter.

She shared a close bond with Parveena, entrusting her with her secrets, fears, joys and sorrows. When she left for Hajj, Parveena packed her clothes, readied her, and ran her errands. In her last months, she was not keeping well and Parveena went to her home to see her a couple of times. Parveena recalls the last time Mogal Maas came to the park for sit-in protest:

She wailed. She was inconsolable and told me she feels suffocated and her heart is heavy. I had never seen her like that. She beat her chest, pulled her hair in grief. (personal interview, 2013)

Parveena poignantly recalls a haunting memory of her vyes, Mogal Maas, and it emphasises the affective alliance of witnesses that constitutes vvestoan in life, death, and beyond:

She had made preparations for her death. She didn't want to be dependent on anyone. She had bought her *kafan* [shroud], isband, stacked away a bar of soap for her funeral rites. She came home once and showed her shroud to me, saying she had exchanged the older one which she didn't like and bought a new one. She gave me her son's file. Look for my son, he is like your brother, as you look for your own after I die, she told me. I tried to calm her down but she said she feels she is going to die soon. "I have no one. You are my daughter, my friend. Wash me up during my funeral bath and please mourn for me properly," she told me.

## Postscript

As a child, my grandmother would often take me to a neighbourhood mosque embraced in ivy. Before the prayers, a rhythm of its own would emanate from the mosque hall—women greeting each other, sharing everyday anecdotes, dream narrations, joys, maladies, fears, laughter, and grief. The hall would reverberate with women's supplications and recitation of the Quran in a sing-song manner. After adjusting

their scarves, hems, and sleeves, women would stand together and begin to pray in unison. While bowing down on the ground for *sajdeh*, I would steal chances and secretly lift my head up to see a spectacle I never got tired of watching—heads bowed down, in neat rows of coloured scarves. It appeared as if women shared secrets in whispers. This is my foremost memory of women's gatherings. It is my grandmother and her friends who, through their bond, introduced me to the magical world of female friendships and bonding, and intimate women's worlds.

In conclusion, I offer a poetic commentary of vvestoan, a succinct and poignant articulation encapsulated in a song I first heard at the maenzraat in Pahladej:

Aes che vedveneye janaawaar,  
Aes che vedveneye te paan ven kuneye,  
Aes che vedveneye janaawaar,  
Aes che asvenye, paan ven kuneye,  
Aes che vedveneye janaawaar  
[We are the flying birds,  
Together, we take flight,  
We are the flying birds  
We, the joyous, companions,  
We, the flying birds]

## NOTES

- 1 Tumbakhaer, a membranophone, is an earthen hand or goblet drum with animal skin as its base, notably played by women during celebratory occasions such as weddings. It is played with a rhythmic movement of hands and fingertips while it is held under the arm or it rests on the knee or in the lap. Beats of the tumbakhaer accompany collective singing in Kashmir and it is one of the main instruments to maintain rhythm in these songs.
- 2 Logs of wood arranged in a particular way for cooking elaborate meals for a large number of people.
- 3 Roughly translates as "the light of our eyes is snatched/here graveyards, vast, fill too quick."
- 4 Roughly translates as, "knows of loss, the daughter, who lost her father/here graveyards, vast, fill too quick."
- 5 Parveena Ahanger's son Javaid Ahmed Ahanger was subjected to enforced disappearance on 18 August 1990 and Haleema Begum's husband Abdul Rashid Ganaie was subjected to enforced disappearance on 5 January 1998.
- 6 For work on mourning, memory and resistance of women activists of APDP, see Zia (2014) and "Khooon Di Barav" (Blood leaves its Trail), a film by Iffat Fatima. Also see, "Till Then the Roads Carry Her"—a film on women's resistance in Kashmir—by Uzma Falak.
- 7 As opposed to pathological and clinical approaches to trauma, drawing from Taylor (2003), the focus here is on "non-pathological cause and canalisation of trauma."
- 8 A call to march towards Tchar-e-Sharief, the mausoleum of Kashmir's mystic poet Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali.
- 9 For an insight into the historical continuum of women's resistance in Kashmir, see Gazi (2017). Also see Malik (2015); Manekshaw (2017).
- 10 For similar argument on funerals and demonstrations, see Kaul (2016).
- 11 For example, 15th-century Persian poet Jami who uses the trope of Zulaykha's longing for the beautiful and moon-faced Yusuf, interpreted

mystically, or Kashmir's 18th century poet Mahmud Gami's Yusuf and Zulaykha.

- 12 For a discussion on statist narrative of empowerment and its critique, see Bhan (2014), and Mushtaq and Bukhari (2018).

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